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Adventure

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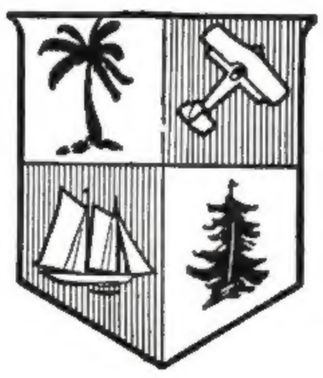

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Adventure

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A. A. Proctor
EDITOR

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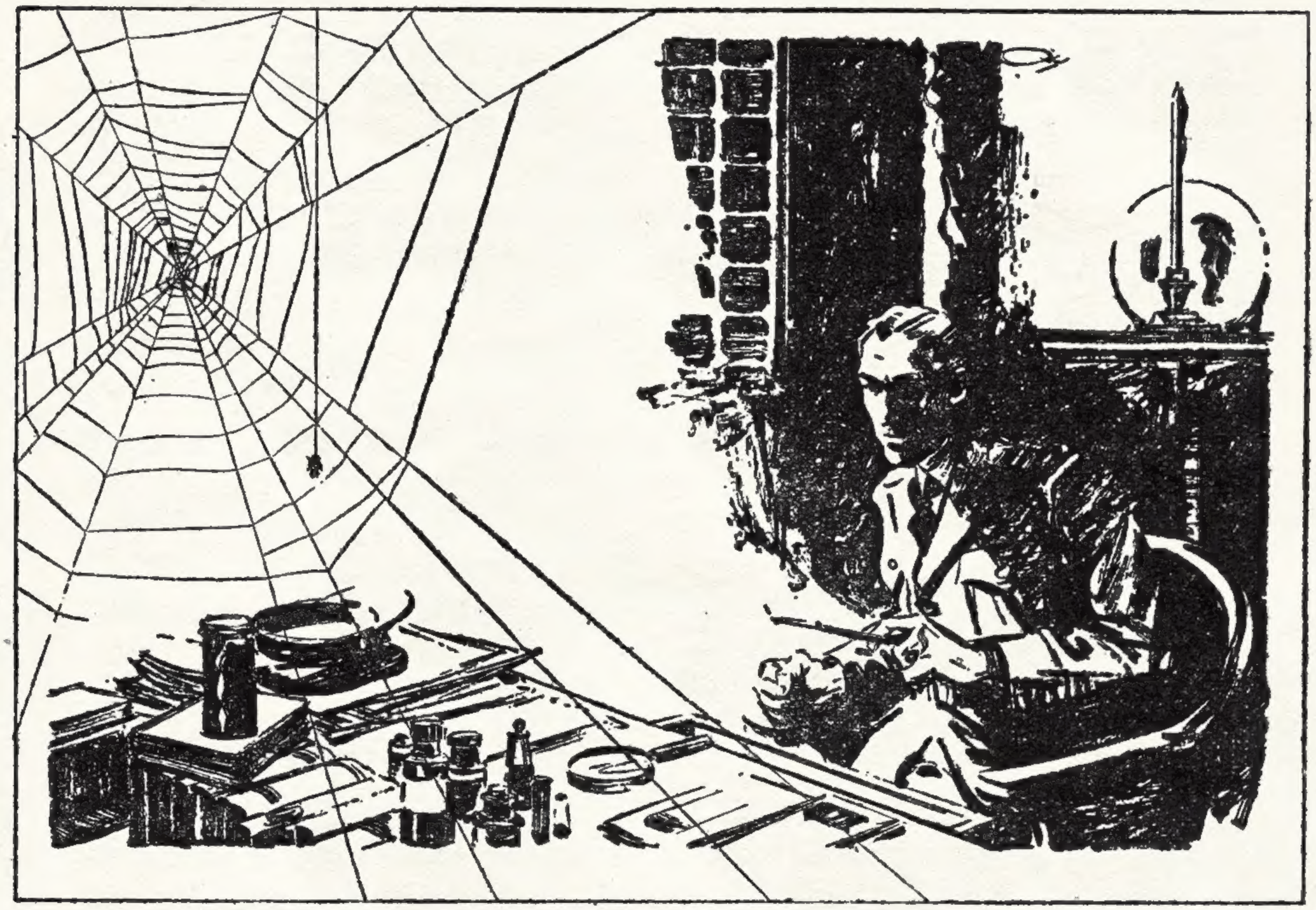
The Phantom Muscovite



By ARED WHITE

Author of "The Spy Net"

THE serenity of the French countryside was disturbed intermittently by the metallic crackle of pistol fire as Captain Fox Elton awakened, remembered that he was in his peaceful billet just outside the American headquarters village, and stretched himself lazily. He identified the firing with an amused smile. So the veteran Sergeant Walters was at his marksmanship again, despite Elton's insistence of the night before that his faithful assistant find relaxation trying for trout in the nearby Marne.

Elton rose without haste, took his time at shaving, then rang for his breakfast, which was brought to his room by the French crone at whose home he was quartered. The October sun was in at his window, and a glance at his watch told him the morning was half gone. There was luxurious comfort in that discovery. Time might drag on as it pleased while he rested and slept and beguiled the hours to suit his own indolent whims. Colonel Rand, counter-espionage chief, had commanded him to rest while he might, after his recent adventures with the Prussian secret service in Switzerland and Belgium.

Elton sauntered out through the gardens to the place where Walters was in action in front of a grassy mound that served as natural backstop for his

pellets. The sergeant had contrived a bobbing target by digging a trench deep enough to shield the body of a French lad whom he had impressed into emergency service as pit detail. The target was an improvised silhouette of cardboard attached to a slat.

"Pretty work, Walters," Elton spoke up. "I didn't know you were quite that expert. But why on earth—?"

"Beg pardon, sir," said Walters, wheeling at sound of the captain's voice. He shook his head deprecatingly. "Sure need a lot of practice to get back into top shape, Cap'n. Missed clean once this morning, and got five outside of center."

"A fine way to squander your vacation, Walters," Elton chided. "Thought you were going fishing this morning."

"Yes, sir. But I got hold of some more good pistol ammunition last night," Walters replied.

"I presume, by that reasoning, if you had drawn a new issue of field shoes you'd feel in duty bound to be out on a practice march, eh?"

"Sir, in the twenty years I've been in Service, marksmanship has been my pie. I've been in every National Match from Seagirt to Camp Perry. Twice I got away with the National Pistol Match. One day I'm going to take the National Individual Match with the rifle. But since they took me out of the line and put me on this spy-chasing duty with the Cap'n, I ain't had the time for practice. My hand's been slipping a little. And if I don't keep up my practice, where do I get off, sir, when this war's over and I have to go against the best thousand shots in the country at the National Matches?"

Elton sensed for the first time, out of the other's words and intensity, something of that strange passion in which marksmanship grips such men as Walters.

"Well, if that's what you enjoy, stick with it," he acquiesced. "I didn't understand, though I've certainly had cause enough in past to be grateful for that little weapon of yours, eh, Walters?"

"Thank you, sir. But maybe it's just as well I got a little time off to tune up in before my hand—"

Walters broke off as an auto appeared down the little country road in the distance, coming at high speed. The size of the car, a large sedan with the red-white-and-blue square of general headquarters at the windshield, identified its mission.

"Colonel Rand's own car," Elton groaned. "And from its speed, something's happened. Well, this looks like finis to a delightful breathing spell."

The car bounced up to Elton's billet; a staff lieutenant leaped out and ran inside. Elton went to meet him, the officer's actions confirming a peremptory summons from Rand. The lieutenant, a young reservist with exaggerated military mannerisms, saluted stiffly and opened his mouth to speak.

"Colonel Rand directs that Captain Elton report to him immediately!" Elton supplied the words with a laugh.

"Yes, sir, but the colonel used the word 'instantly'," the lieutenant corrected.

Elton left Walters to burn up what was left of his ammunition and sped to the old French casern that housed American headquarters. He saw Colonel Cordon coming from Rand's private office, which stripped away any doubt of the importance of the summons. Cordon, who worked out of the chief-of-staff's office, gave Elton a significant glance. Cordon's interest in a case meant that it was being watched by the chief-of-staff; which meant that the commander of the Expeditionary Forces was interested.

COLONEL RAND was at his desk in a glum silence that was most eloquent of pressing business. His thick lips were pressed close together; his sandy brows met over his long, blunt nose; and his head was thrust forward until his broad chin touched his folded arms. He re-

tained this pose in silence until Elton reported formally, then handed his star operative a sheet of paper upon which was scrawled:

> Yussilov en route to Paris. Mission unknown. Dangerous assassin. Consult Russian record.—14

"Interesting," said Elton, a flicker of amusement at Rand's tragic air passing over his finely composed features. He read the message through several times and added, "I take it, sir, that I am recalled from leave to serve on the Yussilov reception committee?"

"We will omit levity, Elton!" snapped Rand. "You will see presently that it is a mighty serious piece of business. First, the chief-of-staff is personally interested in this case."

"Yes, sir," Elton assented placidly. "I noted Colonel Cordon leaving here and guessed that much. But if the Colonel will give me the other facts."

"That message, Elton," Rand announced, pointing a tense finger, "came from our important undercover agent at Berlin, an agent who does not dabble in incidental espionage matters! Agent 14 is being held in Berlin against the day of armistice negotiations and would not report on this fellow Yussilov unless he had good reason for suspecting big mischief. You will appreciate this even more when I explain that in order to get this message to us, he had to expend one of his two available couriers to Copenhagen, whence the message was cabled in enciphered code, disguised as a business message, to our London headquarters. They shot it on here by airplane today. Colonel Cordon decoded it, consulted with the chief-of-staff and delivered the job to us with instructions that it have the right of way."

"Any other information, sir?"

"Nothing! We have Yussilov's record, of course, thanks to that rascal of a Lenin. Here, you may take these Russian documents with you, and I think they'll convince you that Yussilov has been able to take care of himself in the past."

"So that summarizes all available information? A person named Yussilov, Russian extraction, is somewhere in Paris, or en route thereto, on some unknown Prussian mischief. Does the chief's office promise further information from their Berlin agent?"

"Nothing!" Rand snapped the word, stung by an implication in Elton's voice. "Cordon turned the case over and said we could expect no help from him." The colonel's voice became bitter as he added, "A nice sized order when you analyze it. And if there're some munition plants dynamited in the next month by these Russian agents, or any one else, my section will get the blame!"

"Oh, hardly that, sir," Elton said almost too innocently. "If what I hear is true, the French are soon pinning the Legion of Honor on the Colonel for his services."

Rand winced and eyed Elton sharply.

"Take those Russian documents with you, Elton. Let me have your estimate of the situation, with recommendations, as promptly as possible, sir. That's all!"

THE Russian documents, which Elton carried to the seclusion of his cubbyhole office, were in three loosely bound volumes, purporting to be a complete official catalogue of the old Czarist police and secret Okhrana agents, who had fled Russia in the teeth of the Bolshevik régime. The documents had been furnished obligingly by command of Lenin with the warning to the Allies that these discredited Russian agents now were in the service of the Central Empire as mercenary spies. Doubtless, Elton reasoned, similar records had been sent to the Kaiser's headquarters with the charge that the same men were in Allied hire. Thus might the Reds expect to wreak revenge upon these fugitive terrorists of Nicholas's discarded spies.

Elton turned at once to the page devoted to Yussilov. The Okhrana record

merely listed him as to height, weight, education, personal appearance and ability as a secret agent of the Czar. There were notations of official missions to Turkey, Japan, Switzerland, Germany, Austria and the United States, of which secret excursions no details were given. But a crisp entry by Vassilyev, head of the Okhrana in the last days of the Russian Empire, encompassed volumes. It read, "his Majesty's ablest and most resourceful agent".

The Lenin régime, in preparing these records for Allied consumption, dilated upon Yussilov with many adjectives and bitter invective. A soulless scoundrel, specialist in wanton assassination. A monstrous parasite, betraying his Russian brothers for bloody Czarist rubles. A shadow of the dark, a phantom of the devil, gifted with a sinister genius for changing his appearance by a trick of muscular control and manipulation of features, sponsor of a diabolical plot to circumvent the revolution by murdering its vital leaders—at the Czar's downfall, he escaped from Russia through a net of ten thousand vigilant patriots.

There was added to those observations the following offer:

> Upon evidence of Yussilov's execution in any Allied country, there will be paid by the Russian government to the agent or agents responsible for such death, a sum in gold equivalent to 25,000 rubles.

The proffer was attested for Russia by the signature of Jerzhinsky, head of Lenin's Chekka, who was to be notified at his Lyublyanka Street headquarters, Moscow.

Yussilov's photograph peered meekly out of the maze of invective as an anticlimax to all these monstrous attributes. It was much as if the description of a dinosaur had been illustrated with the photograph of a tadpole. The Yussilov photo appeared that of an innocent, inoffensive little Muscovite, guileless as a moujik musketeer. The Yussilov features were essentially Russian, though commonplace: thin, slightly arched brows over deepset eyes; nose straight, lean and bulging at the nostrils; upper lip screened by a thin mustache; lines of chin and jaw cloaked in a hirsute fringe. Yussilov's age was set down as thirty, though in the photograph he looked like a student of twenty.

Detailed study under a strong glass convinced Elton that the photograph was valueless. There was no feature or characteristic of face, head or torso that might be singled out to distinguish Yussilov from any one of a million Russians. In France there were probably ten thousand such, stranded by the Imperial collapse, the majority of them soldiers in the old Russian uniform, men without a country, held in French detention camps for light road and forestry work in return for rations.

A BUZZER broke Elton's thoughts, followed by a succession of buzzings that took him hurrying to Rand's office. The colonel met him in an anteroom, escorted him into the inner espionage sanctum, carefully closed the door and pointed tensely to the private telephone that connected with Paris headquarters.

"Some one insists on speaking with you personally. Wouldn't even tell who wanted you," Rand muttered.

"My dear Captain Elton," said a pleasant French voice as Elton took up the receiver, "things are very stupid in Paris at present. Will you please to join with me in a hunt for the wild boar in the Vosges, or is it that you are occupied?"

"I'd be delighted, monsieur," Elton replied. "I've been taking things easy at my billet for most of a week and would be glad to have a real outing in the country."

"Bien, my Captain!" the other responded gratefully. "The good Count de Boisrouvray have extend to us the use of his shooting lodge at Mirabeau. I shall call for you with my Renault in precisely four hours. You will be ready?"

"Thanks a thousand times, monsieur," Elton rejoined. "Haven't a thing on hand at present—that is, nothing of consequence. I'll be ready to shove off for the count's hunting lodge in four hours. *Au revoir.*"

Rand was at the point of explosion as Elton hung up.

"The meaning of that extraordinary conversation!" he demanded.

"Lieutenant d'Auteuil of the French Deuxième Bureau, sir. It must be something of unusual importance since he was so careful to conceal his real purpose, even over this secret wire. Must be, sir, the French have winded Yussilov."

Rand scowled over this possibility.

"Mighty unlikely," he concluded. "We have told the French nothing of Yussilov. Nor is it probable they were in position to get the tip from Berlin."

"But the Colonel will agree that the French come to us only when they want important help. We can gamble on it D'Auteuil wouldn't race up here from Paris unless he wanted to use us."

"In any event," Rand said with sudden relish, "Yussilov is more their funeral than ours. I'd cheerfully turn the whole mess over to them if I could. Just what, Elton, have you been able to figure out from those Russian records I gave you?"

"This Yussilov case does not look very promising at first blush, sir. Least promising of anything we've tackled lately."

Rand's face fell at this pessimism from his star operative, and he stroked his nose with his thought-provoking forefinger.

"It's not often, Elton," he demurred, "that we are furnished a clear photograph of our man, together with his detailed personal record."

"Nor, sir," Elton rejoined, "is it often we're called upon to pick up a rascal who was able to play hide and seek for years with a thousand packs of Nihilist wolves in a country where intrigue is a fine art. As for our descriptions of Yussilov, the only definite information that we can count upon is that he is sixty-seven and three-eighths inches high. His other traits he seems able to disguise at will."

"I'm not minimizing the difficulties, Elton. But let's concern ourselves less with alibis and more with constructive analysis. What I want from you, as soon as possible, is your estimate of the situation and your proposed plans of action. How soon will you be able to report?"

"You may have those now, sir. There is only one deduction possible at present. Yussilov's entire record shrieks of violence. So we know he is coming over on a career of ruin. Logically, if the Germans wanted information, they would rely upon their own trained military agents. What form Yussilov's violence will take remains to be seen. Assassination seems to have been his specialty—killing off the Czar's most dangerous enemies. It may be he is coming over here to dynamite munition works, troop trains, docks and railroads, either singly or with the aid of a Russian wolf pack. At that we can only guess at this time."

Rand again stroked his nose and finally nodded.

"Reasonable, I'd say. Your plan for meeting that threat, if you have one?"

"Sir, there can be but one plan, whether we like it or not. Sit tight until Yussilov shows his hand."

The colonel rose and walked the floor. Elton was able to follow his chief's mental processes. It was a critical situation, in Rand's mind. His proposed decoration by the French was a thing of mere recommendation, lacking the final official confirmation of all the bureaus, French and American, that must precede the actual pinning on of the coveted medal. A waiting game at present was not to Rand's liking.

"I don't like waiting, so go over the whole case again, Elton," Rand commanded. "Make certain you've overlooked nothing. Be sure you plan a

preliminary net that I can show Cordon. And let me know promptly what brings D'Auteuil up here. That's all, sir."

LIEUTENANT D'Auteuil, executive officer of the Deuxième Bureau, arrived at the casern shortly after dark. Whatever haste brought him from Paris to Chaumont in the record time of four hours was suspended until he exhausted the official French amenities. The state of Elton's health having been disposed of, the Frenchman went flatly to business.

"Perhaps it is, my Captain, that you can save our bureau much time. We have intercept a cipher, the importance of which we wish to determine without delay."

"The last German cipher I dealt with is less than a fortnight old, monsieur," Elton replied. "It was used in the case of their distinguished naval spy. And I doubt if Spa knows yet that he is held for execution at Vincennes. I have the key in my files if you wish to consult it."

"*Merci bien!*" exclaimed D'Auteuil.

While Elton rummaged in his private files for the last German cipher, one whose breaking had cost him a round ten days of sleepless labor, D'Auteuil took from his pocketbook a thin strip of paper approximately the size of three ordinary postage stamps. The Frenchman took the key from Elton and began applying it to his intercepted message with the aid of a strong glass. After some minutes of concentration, in which he made no progress, the Frenchman leaned back with an impatient shrug for relaxation from the puzzle.

"A new case your bureau has taken up, monsieur?" Elton inquired.

"Perhaps yes, perhaps no, my Captain," D'Auteuil replied with a shrug. "The cipher itself must tell us that. One of our operatives he find the message conceal against the eardrum of a suspected runner at our Belgian frontier."

"A Russian, your prisoner, I take it?" Elton suggested.

"A Russian, yes." D'Auteuil looked sharply at Elton. "But why do you guess that, my Captain?"

"I thought perhaps you had winded a possible courier of Yussilov's, monsieur."

"Yussilov?" The Frenchman was genuinely puzzled by the reference. "Yussilov—ah, yes, I remember such a fellow at Berne. Two years ago when we were angling for Lenin, who managed to give us the slip and upset Russia. But why do you mention Yussilov?"

Elton dropped the subject, sensing that the Frenchman had no inkling of the Muscovite's advent.

"Perhaps I can help you with the cipher, since I am so thoroughly familiar with the key," he proposed, taking the strip of mottled paper from D'Auteuil's hand.

D'Auteuil accepted gratefully, and the two joined efforts over the intercept. While D'Auteuil read the message aloud from under a magnifying glass, Elton wrote it down in bold, workable letters:

TGPHWFZOPKPF XIZFSOQI CKZGRI CHWEOVZMWHPG YFRK (Six illegible letters) ZH TFRHPIXKZOYHQK ZFPE CHPESNDOZEPFPK TGZOVGTGWK VH. XMWO—

In recent cipher formulas used by Prussian agents in France, an arrangement had been devised that, while easily memorized, was intricate enough in application to balk some of the best Allied cryptographers. Elton's key, which had cost him days of acute mental gymnastics in unmasking its secrets, read:

	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V
	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C
D F	e	f	g	h	i	j	k
G H	l	m	n	o	p	q	r
I K	s	t	u	v	w	x	y
L M	z	1	2	3	4	5	6
N O	7	8	9	a	b	c	d

In order to have this cipher key available for use in composing messages for transmittal across the Rhine, or deciphering messages received, the Prussian agent was put to no great feat of memory. He needed only to remember that the first four letters of the alphabet were relegated to the end of his key and that, beginning with the fifth letter, he first constructed his symbol letters at left and top, then set down the alphabet in squares, beginning with the fifth letter again and transposing the first four letters to the end. The numbers 1 to 9 served as nulls as well as figures.

In composing or deciphering a message, a system similar to that of locating map points by means of coordinates was used. The capitals over the squares identified the column, those to the left located the row of the true letter intended. Each pair of cipher letters thus fixed upon a single letter. Of the first of the symbols in the intercepted message, TG, the T indicated the column of boxed letters—i, p, w, 4, b. The letter G, by fixing the row, promptly identified the true letter meant for the Imperial General Staff, or p. The letter p likewise was symbolized by the other letters set over and to the left, and thus yielded to AH, AG, and TH. By the same process the second two letters in the message reduced to l and the third to e.

D'Auteuil gave an exclamation of joy as the message began unfolding to the Elton formula. In a few minutes the following incomplete message was down on paper, enough to promise them certain success:

PLEASE THAT YOU RE . . LL GU . . . O INSTANT HE REACHES PARPS. R-17*

Another half hour of concentration failed to supply the incompleted or obviously garbled letters. But it convinced Elton that error in enciphering was at fault, rather than any change in his broken German key. The fellow who wrote that message must have been in a great hurry. Numerous hastily jotted symbols attested that.

He tried his hand at filling in the missing letters arbitrarily. The fourth word he and D'Auteuil accepted tentatively as RECALL, and PARPS as PARIS. That left only the word GU . . . O to be accounted for. From the nature of the message Elton guessed that GU . . . O was a proper name, possibly a Prussian agent whose presence in France was objectionable to the author of the message. The crispness of the demand lent substance to such a theory.

"An Italian name, perhaps, my Captain," D'Auteuil suggested after he had exhausted his store of German and Austrian names without result. "Guidio, Guatto, Guasco."

The Frenchman shook his head after each name. Elton, a sudden new enthusiasm burning in his eye, began thumbing through the records of Russian agents of the Okhrana. Shortly his attention fixed upon a large square face with heavy jowls that glared up from a Russian official photograph. Underneath was the name, Evno Gushko. Elton took his pencil with a sure hand and completed the message.

PLEASE THAT YOU RECALL GUSHKO INSTANT HE REACHES PARIS. R-17

"A miraculous piece of good fortune, monsieur!" Elton exclaimed. He handed to D'Auteuil the completed message together with the record of Evno Gushko. "You see, the whole thing seems to connect up beautifully."

D'Auteuil appraised Elton's work with a critical eye and shook his head dubiously.

"The name, it fit, my Captain. But of the Russian, Gushko, I have never heard. Is it not that there are many names also that fit? Perhaps the name Gushko—it is what you call the mere coincidence."

"And a mighty fortunate coincidence,

*The English equivalents of the breakdown of all ciphers involved in this story are used in order to make the method of deciphering as simple as possible for the average reader.—Ed.

this whole affair, monsieur!" Elton exulted. "This message fits right into the trail we're looking for—Ivan Yussilov!"

The French officer received Elton's words with a blank stare.

"Let me explain," Elton spoke up. "Very shortly before you telephoned from Paris I had been yanked in from a delightful vacation at my billet with information that the Russian, Yussilov, is on his way to Paris. Doubtless, monsieur, you know enough about that phantom Muscovite to realize the odds against finding him, since we knew nothing of his route or his mission. Does that explain my enthusiasm at finding our trails joined together, monsieur?"

D'Auteuil's normally placid face registered swiftly changing emotions. The play of his features ended in a sudden joyous enthusiasm.

"The miracle, my Captain!" he cried, leaping to his feet. "Yussilov coming to Paris? Ah, that this slippery scoundrel should have such audacity!" He seized Elton's hand and wrung it heartily. "*Bien*, my Captain, our trails they meet. *Oui*, my cipher and Yussilov they are one. So neither of us will be put to great trouble, my Captain. Even now I invite you to Vincennes to see Yussilov before our firing squad."

"Thank you, monsieur," Elton said with a dry smile. "But there remains the detail of finding our goose before we pluck him. You are thoroughly familiar with Yussilov's past record?"

"Yes, of that I am well informed. There is nothing of which this Slav is not capable. Ah, you look at him, you blink the eyes; *presto!* He is change. One minute you see Yussilov, another minute he is gone! The flea is not more difficult."

D'Auteuil waxed eloquent as he recounted the Russian's sly capacities.

"My Captain, many times the Nihilists have Yussilov in the trap. They shoot, but the bullets do not kill. No, for he has a sly trick so that even the expert with pistols can not hit him. Yes, many times the Nihilists vow they have kill Yussilov, then come Yussilov in the flesh to laugh at them. The cat of nine times nine lives, my Captain!"

"Well, in view of all that, monsieur," Elton bantered, "are you certain I would be wholly justified in accepting your invitation to see Yussilov executed—again?"

D'Auteuil gave a short laugh, shrugged and lighted a cigaret.

"In a moment, my Captain, you will understand. It was Yussilov who is sent to Berne by his emperor two years ago to kill Lenin. Our own best agents go to Switzerland to serve with the Russian agents against the German plot for the revolution. For three months we are busy, my Captain; and twenty of Lenin's wolves we destroy with the knife of Yussilov. Then Lenin himself we locate in a secret chalet among the Alps. Yussilov work with great caution, and in one day more he would reach Lenin. But the Russian play in great good luck and leave in a sealed trail before Yussilov can strike.

"But you see, my Captain," D'Auteuil went on, "it was for three months that Yussilov work with the agents of France. Three of my best men—Lebre, Guijot and Fernand-Loriot. Ah, they help Yussilov with his disguise, they pass upon his plan, they listen to his boasts. So, do they not learn the Muscovite book of tricks, my Captain! Lebre and Fernand-Loriot even now are in Paris with the Deuxième Bureau. Guijot we will recall from Holland if he is needed. Yussilov will find them waiting for him in Paris. An unhappy disadvantage for the Russian, is it not, now that we know of his coming, my Captain?"

"Excellent," Elton rejoined. "I accept your invitation to Vincennes cheerfully. I know Colonel Rand will be overjoyed at this great stroke of mutual good fortune. But he will want to offer our services in any way your bureau may suggest."

"The thousand thanks." D'Auteuil beamed. "But under the circumstance

it will not be necessary to put my American friends to the inconvenience. Yussilov, he will be the simple matter."

COLONEL RAND was in a felicitous mood the next morning when Elton reported. There had greeted him, upon his arrival at his desk, an unofficial telephone call from the French Mission.

Tuesday afternoon two weeks hence his decoration was to be bestowed with conventional words and kisses by no less a person than a general of the French army. Two other American section chiefs, a distinguished Italian staff officer, a Canadian general, and the Belgian chief-of-staff were likewise to be honored.

When Elton added his report of the Yussilov turn of events, Rand's rare cup of happiness brimmed over.

"You acted with the rarest judgment and skill, Captain, in turning that case over to the French," he exclaimed, disregarding the fact that Elton had done nothing more than report facts and ask for instructions. He added with a generous sweep of his loose jointed arm, "Go back to your billet and loaf some more; and just to keep you out of mischief, prepare for me a report of your operations to date. You know the proper forms of report. Let me see them from time to time. Draw a typist from the post commandant. That's all, sir."

Elton saluted in ill concealed disappointment. The Yussilov quest, once he had been weaned from his vacation, gripped Elton's imagination. Even an ordinary spy quest in a division sector would be preferable to dawdling away the days upon an official report of past achievements. And he quickly guessed Rand's real motive in wanting such a report. Copies of it would go to all the foreign bureaus, a reminder of Rand's accomplishments as a section chief, subtle bids for recognition. Having scored one French decoration, Rand was out for a whole row of vivid foreign ribbons for the left breast of his uniform.

WHEN, shortly before midnight of the eleventh day, Elton heard a motorcycle in the distance, he emerged from the welter of ink and paper, stirred by a sudden exultation. Intuition bridged the distance. He was downstairs and waiting at the door when the cycle chugged up, as he had been strangely certain that it would. A courier handed him a sealed envelop, addressed in Rand's handwriting. He tore it open to find a single hastily scrawled command—

Report to me instantly at my billet.—Rand

When he left the sidecar at the colonel's billet and stood at the door, he saw his chief anxiously stalking the floor. Rand answered the door personally. There was left in his face nothing of that felicitous humor of the past ten days.

"D'Auteuil is on his way up from Paris," Rand announced. He looked at his watch. "You have only a few minutes in which to talk things over with me, and then to the casern to meet him."

"Yussilov, eh," Elton guessed.

"Yussilov," Rand affirmed. "I don't know the ins and outs of it, but there seems to be some kind of merry hell to pay, Elton."

"What's happened, sir?"

"Don't ask me. But it must be plenty." Rand groaned aloud. "All I know is they're trying to ace us into the hole. Got more than they can bite off and going to make me share their hard luck. Once we're in, even if that Russian pack blows the top off of France, my bureau gets half the blame!"

"On the other hand, sir," Elton rejoined with a sparkle in his eyes, "in event of success the Colonel gets at least half the glory."

"You know as well as I do, Elton," Rand flared, "that the French wouldn't come to us unless their case was hopeless. Just plain politics, that's all. To shift half the abuse on to our shoulders!"

"Any special instructions, sir?" Elton inquired with a certain icy inflection that

never failed to bring Rand to business with a wince.

"Yes! See to it that you do the only thing left for us. Keep the French in charge of the case, with us in the position of merely helping out. That's all, sir."

Lieutenant D'Auteuil was at the casern when Elton reported. They went to Elton's office, exchanging the conventional courtesies as they mounted the heavy steps of the ancient French barracks. After switching on the lights and placing a chair for his guest, Elton saw that circumstances since their last meeting had stripped D'Auteuil of his customary jauntiness. His eyes were cold and set, with dark circles under them, and the muscles of his face were drawn.

"I regret, my Captain," he said quietly, "but the case of Yussilov has become so grave an affair that we are compel to ask your cooperation." He shrugged. "It is with the great humiliation I must admit that Yussilov has given us the slip."

"From that fact, monsieur," Elton replied with generous politeness, "I am forced to conclude that the Russian must have gone back to Germany. He surely couldn't—"

"*Merci*, but you are very kind, Captain Elton. But of Yussilov's presence in Paris we are not left in uncertainty."

"Our Muscovite has definitely shown his hand?" Elton suggested.

"But no, my Captain," D'Auteuil replied bitterly. "Yussilov has shown only his handiwork."

"Your officers who worked with him in Switzerland, they have been unable to find any trace of him?"

The muscles of D'Auteuil's jaws worked; moisture shone in his eyes.

"Do they find him—or is it that he find them?" The Frenchman gave an enigmatic shrug and added in a strained voice, "But Lebre and Fernand-Loriot, whom I love as brothers—they both are dead at the hand of Yussilov."

"I'm sorry," Elton said softly.

"*C'est la guerre,*" D'Auteuil exclaimed, putting his feelings aside with that Spartan phrase.

"It gives us an added incentive to find this Muscovite, monsieur!" Elton exclaimed. "How did Yussilov manage it?"

"No one know, my Captain. Lebre and Fernand-Loriot rejoice at the news of Yussilov. A boastful little mink, whose blood is green malice, they say of this Russian. For three days they spread the great net in Paris and watch for him. Our agents are on the *qui vive*, our bureaus and jails are filled with the suspects. Then Yussilov strike! He have the dastardly plan. Lebre fall in the crowds that come from the Théâtre Français, where Lebre have watch the Russian ballet. In another hour Fernand-Loriot die as he leave the office of the Deuxième Bureau."

"Yussilov used a knife and escaped in the confusion?"

D'Auteuil, whose steadiness of nerves was attested by four wound stripes and the Médaille Militaire, shuddered.

"No one see anything except the death of Lebre and Fernand-Loriot. They are lying in the street in a convulsion, as if it was the stroke of apoplexy or the failure of the heart. Our surgeons they are much puzzled. It is many hours before one of them find, with a great glass, the tiny mark at the armpit of Fernand-Loriot and under the shoulderblade of Lebre. A terrible poison, perhaps a cyanide, fed through the needle of a hypodermic. He need only touch his victim, and it is death. And this brother of the devil, perhaps he stand by with the crowd that gather and felicitate himself upon his fiendish cunning. A dangerous little snake that leave no trail!"

"A dangerous little snake, monsieur," Elton repeated. "But please remember, monsieur, there is nothing that crawls without leaving a trail behind. Just what other mischief has Yussilov been up to?"

"Nothing, my Captain. Not once more have he show his hand. So it is we know he lays the plan for the great mischief. From Lebre I learn of Yussilov that it is his way to spend the

weeks, perhaps the months, weaving his plan. Then he strike—one, two, three—and is gone."

"What of Guijot, the third of your agents who worked with the Russian in Switzerland?"

"Guijot have just come from Holland, my Captain. But the Colonel l'Ourcq, chief of my bureau, have direct that we shall not risk the life of Guijot. In Switzerland, my Captain, I did not with my own eyes see the Russian, Yussilov. So, since Guijot is the last of our agents who may identify the Russian, we hold him in the greatest safety in a guarded chamber of the Palace of Justice until we find Yussilov in our net."

"A discreet decision, monsieur," Elton commented. He consulted his watch and saw that it was close to one o'clock. "Now if you will just sketch in all other developments, beginning with our last meeting. After that I think we ought to work out a detailed chart. What of that copy of the intercepted Yussilov cipher you were sending into Imperial headquarters by one of your spy doubles?"

"Of that, my Captain, I can report the great success," said D'Auteuil.

He rapidly sketched in this episode. The copy made by Elton of the Yussilov cipher was concealed in the ear of a Russian mercenary, who was fed through the Belgian frontier with orders to deliver it to the nearest German outpost known to receive spy messages. An *Oberleutnant* received the message without suspicion and wired the symbols to Imperial headquarters at Spa. An immediate reply came back from Spa, was enciphered by the *Oberleutnant* and delivered to D'Auteuil's spy double for delivery to Yussilov.

D'Auteuil took from his pocketbook a deciphered copy of the Prussian reply and handed it to Elton.

> R17—Gushko agent MI. not subject my control. Ignore him. Let nothing interfere your work—1

"Do you not instantly see the significance, my Captain?" cried D'Auteuil. "No. 1, it is the signature of Von Ludendorff himself. Do the Imperial spymaster and quartermaster-general waste his time on petty matters? Never! And do you not detect the arrogance of Ludendorff. Does he not turn up his nose because Gushko is an agent of the ministry of the interior? And so he gives the veiled authority that Yussilov may deal as he please with Gushko, to whom Yussilov object."

"An important document," Elton affirmed. "I agree at once with your deductions regarding it. But have you been able to get any trace of this Gushko? That angle ought to—"

"Ah, but certainly, my Captain! In two days my men arrest Gushko, in a suite at the Hôtel Grand Palais d'Orsay, where he pass himself as an officer of the Italian Mission."

"Just how did you find Gushko's trail, monsieur?"

"Gushko was the simple fool, Captain Elton. He leave a cipher on his desk at the hotel where it is seen by the *femme de chambre,* who report to the *maître d'hôtel. Voilà!* Fernand-Loriot and Lebre they have Gushko a prisoner at the bureau within two hours."

"You were able to get nothing out of Gushko?"

"Diable! For two days and nights our men work with Gushko. They are not so gentle, and try the Russian's strength by the thumbs. But the training of the Okhrana—his tongue is steel. The most we get from him is that he is a Russian refugee who wrote no cipher. Not another thing will Gushko say to us."

ELTON sat in thoughtful silence for some time.

"He may have been telling the truth as to the cipher," he suggested. "I see a possibility in that circumstance. Now, are there any other significant developments before we start prying into details?"

"Nothing, my Captain," D'Auteuil concluded after reflection. He started to say something, broke off, then added,

"Nothing of importance, my Captain."

They launched a summary chart, writing down each incident in all its developments. Each asked the other many questions, in an effort to exhaust the possibilities of their meager information. Elton's interest centered in the circumstances surrounding the arrest of Gushko. Was it not possible, he argued, that Yussilov had planted the cipher in Gushko's room and arranged the tip-off by the chambermaid?

"But what need it matter, my Captain?" the Frenchman argued, impatient at Elton's persistence in exploring the Gushko arrest. "The rascal, Gushko, is in our net. Nothing will it cause him to speak. The evidence against him, it is perfect for our court."

"You have the bit of cipher the chambermaid found?"

"But yes, in the safe of the Deuxième Bureau at Paris."

"Good," said Elton, and turned back to the chart.

Three o'clock saw their work completed. Analysis, argument, discussion brought no new light, developed no subtle trail or lead. The French had exerted themselves intelligently. There was no section of Paris that had not been scanned. The most skilful operatives of the Deuxième Bureau and of the Paris secret police had exhausted every resource. Hundreds of Russians had been taken as suspects and grilled. The Russian detention camp near Troyes had been covered by Russian mercenaries. But the resources of French secret service had been extended to no purpose. Yussilov remained the phantom Muscovite, his sinister cunning in destroying two of the three French agents who might identify him proving him the most dangerous as well as the most crafty of foemen.

"One final point," Elton said, tendering his cigaret case to D'Auteuil, "that Russian camp at Troyes, to which you made reference; it has often struck me, as I drove past, as being an excellent rendezvous for trouble makers. Are you positive—"

"Of everything that happen at Troyes we are inform," D'Auteuil averred. "The Russian soldiers are the great problem since Russia fall to pieces. For their rations we require that they work; and though they are not prisoners, their camp at Troyes it is walled by wire to a height of forty feet. Not even our German prisoners, my Captain, have less liberty. But one Russian, the fellow Poppov, escape from us, and our patrols pick him up near Belfort when he try to pass the lines."

"Something recent, monsieur?"

"The week ago, my Captain. Ah, but for the one day we are most suspicious. We think it is the great clue. But it is nothing."

"You hadn't mentioned that before, monsieur. No matter how unimportant it may seem now, don't you think we'd better bring everything into our picture?"

D'Auteuil rapidly sketched in the missing incident. A French intelligence patrol had picked up a Russian soldier named Poppov, who was trying to get through the lines near Belfort late at night. They found on him a sheet of paper that strongly suggested code. Thereupon the suspect was whisked to Paris and examined by the Deuxième Bureau.

His story was straightforward and convincing. He had escaped from the Russian detention camp near Troyes after receiving word that his mother was desperately ill at Moscow. As for the suspected message, it was something he had written for his own use, and meant nothing to any one else. After verifying Poppov's story of a sick mother at Moscow, testing his letter for code, cipher and secret inks, the bureau finally concluded that Poppov was telling the truth. They sent him back to Troyes for internment with his work battalion.

Elton's interest quickened during this recital.

"You have that message the fellow Poppov carried?" he inquired.

The Frenchman took from his pocketbook a folded sheet of paper and handed it to Elton.

"This is the copy I write down when Belfort report on the telephone of Poppov's arrest."

The writing was in Russian, and under it D'Auteuil's translation, which read:

> Our noblest leaders they are Clemenceau, Lloyd-George, Poincaré, Foch, Jacques, Gens. Haig, Currie, Liggett, Pétain, many others whose minds bring victory. October 31.

"An unusual document for a fugitive to be carrying through the lines," said Elton, his brows converging. "What did you find was the meaning of it?"

"In the Russian, my Captain, the meaning it is more coherent. Poppov explain that he write it for his own memory of the great men who will destroy Prussia. The date, it is Poppov's prediction of the end of the War. With the greatest care we weigh Poppov's story, my Captain. Poppov carry the letter openly, and do not try at its concealment. And such a letter. It would be like the thoughts of a fool Russian."

Elton nodded thoughtful assent. He turned back to his desk, added the circumstance to their chart and folded the document into the pocket of his blouse. Then he rose.

"I think that's as far as we can get here, monsieur," he announced. "I needn't tell you that Colonel Rand insists upon every cooperation possible being given your bureau in this Yussilov affair. I'm ready now to start for Paris."

IN THE dark corridor outside his office Elton nearly collided with a shadowy person. Walters's sixth sense for trouble had brought him to the casern close on Elton's heels, and he had no intention of being left behind.

"Pardon, sir, but I was standing by, in case the Cap'n had anything for me to do," the veteran announced expectantly.

"Of course, Sergeant," said Elton, as Walters fell into step beside him.

This was not, Elton thought, the type of case in which Walters would be of value. Dependability, courage, tenacity and discretion the veteran noncom possessed in the highest degree. But subtlety must be counted upon in running to earth the phantom from Russia. Yet Elton, in the light of Walters's past valor, hadn't the heart to turn him bluntly aside. Besides, there was always the possibility that Walters might be worked in on some detail of a case.

"Glad you showed up," Elton equivocated generously. "Just leaving on a case, and may need you later. Come on down to Paris on the morning train and await word from me at our military police headquarters, Rue Ste. Anne."

"Yes, sir!" said Walters in a voice that rang with enthusiasm.

THE French military sedan landed Elton and D'Auteuil in Paris by sunup. They stopped for a hurried breakfast at the Meurice, then drove on to the quarters of the Deuxième Bureau.

On reaching D'Auteuil's desk at the bureau, Elton asked first for the Gushko cipher, the one that had betrayed the Russian prisoner at the Hôtel Grand Palais d'Orsay. On examining it under a glass he saw that it was an altogether different cipher system from that used by Yussilov. Gushko's cipher, in fact, was a discarded one that the French had unmasked many weeks before.

From his pocketbook Elton took the original Yussilov cipher, from which he had made an exact copy for D'Auteuil's use ten days before, and studied it minutely. As he compared the tiny symbols painstakingly, his eyes kindled.

"As I thought, monsieur," he said; and added quickly, "Have you got the fellow, Gushko, handy, where I can have a little talk with him alone?"

"If the Captain wish," said D'Auteuil, mildly put out that Elton did not take him into his confidence, "I will have the

gendarme bring Gushko here immediately."

The Russian was brought in, his heavy black eyes still dull with sleep and blinking as he tried to fathom in Elton's face the purpose of this summons. Elton indicated a chair for the Muscovite and spent some time in studying the fellow openly, an ordeal which Gushko met with an attitude of indifference.

The Russian, Elton saw, was poorly equipped for a secret service mission on enemy soil. His features were too pronounced—low, wide forehead; thick, converging, black brows; massive, square jaws; large, lusterless black eyes; billowing jowls. He might have passed for an Italian or Turk. But his disadvantage was that any observing person, having once seen him, would be able to identify him at once under any disguise, since his body was as distinctive as his face, having a rugged, beefy bulk that suggested a polar bear in strength. An intelligent fellow, shrewd and calculating, but stubborn, vindictive and with a ready lust for revenge, Elton guessed.

"I'm not going to ask you to talk, Gushko," Elton addressed the Russian in French when he had completed his estimate and decided his course, "but I am going to ask you to listen carefully."

Gushko maintained his attitude of sullen indifference and did not look at Elton.

"I am not here to help you, Gushko," Elton went on. "I am here in my own interests. You mean less than nothing to me. But it so happens that you and I have one interest in common. You can help me and I can help you. First I want you to study this cipher that was found on your desk at the D'Orsay. Here, use this magnifying glass and give your particular attention to the letters F and C."

Gushko stirred at mention of the cipher. After a momentary hesitation he took the slip of paper from Elton's hand and scowled at the symbols, first with his naked eye, then with the glass.

"Observe carefully, monsieur," said Elton, handing him the intercepted Yussilov cipher. "Note that the letters F and C obviously were written by the same man in both messages. There is a queer upward flourish in the formation of the upper stroke that can not be mistaken."

The prisoner glared at first one sheet, then the other, and finally laid them aside with a shrug.

"The point I'm making," Elton said quietly, "is that these symbols establish beyond the slightest doubt that you did not write the cipher found on your desk at the hotel. It was written by your friend, Yussilov, and placed on your desk for reasons that must be very clear to you, monsieur."

Gushko shot a quick look at Elton. His jaw fell. Then he recovered himself and fastened his eyes resolutely on the wall.

"That doesn't mean we haven't plenty of evidence to send you to Vincennes for execution, monsieur," Elton proceeded. "And, as I said before, I haven't any wish to help you out. But you do not impress me as the type of fool who will let your enemy, Yussilov, destroy you when it is in your hands to destroy him and win your own freedom. So I am offering to bargain with you. You can depend upon it that we will keep faith. If, in your own way, you will strike back at Yussilov, we will give you your complete and unequivocal release, with safe custody to Switzerland for your part of the bargain."

Gushko stared on at the wall as if turning a deaf ear to Elton's proposition. But Elton saw the contraction of muscles at the Muscovite's jaws, the play of fire in his eyes. He rose abruptly and closed the interview.

"I will not ask you to give your decision immediately, monsieur. You may think matters over. I'll call for your answer later, and I shall call but once. So make up your mind definitely whether Yussilov laughs over your grave, or you over Yussilov's. You may return to your cell."

AS GUSHKO, without a word or look, was taken out by a gendarme, D'Auteuil reentered the office, his keen eyes searching Elton's face in eager inquiry.

"Gushko said nothing, monsieur," Elton reported. "I merely planted some seeds in his very stubborn mind. Possibly they will grow, possibly not. And now, monsieur, I'd like very much to see that letter that Poppov was carrying."

The original Poppov missive, which D'Auteuil fetched from the bureau's steel vault, was written in thin, angular Russian characters with many tiny flourishes. Elton had settled back for a painstaking study of the letters, his eye falling upon the final phrase in which appeared the figure 31, indicating the date in October that Poppov had explained so whimsically. He spent several minutes over the capitals, making copies of them, comparing the two cipher messages. When he looked up at D'Auteuil there was triumph in his face.

"This Poppov message, monsieur, was written by Yussilov," he announced.

D'Auteuil stared incredulously, stung by the implication that his bureau had been duped by the Russian at Belfort.

"You will see it yourself, monsieur," said Elton. "Examine the capital F in the Poppov message and compare it with the same letter in the Yussilov cipher, and again in the Gushko message. Note that barely perceptible curve in forming the top of the letter and the hint of a flourish at the end of the stroke. The same little idiosyncrasy of penmanship occurs each time you find an F or a C, and to a certain extent is detectable in all the capital letters. It goes to prove, monsieur, that every snake leaves its trail behind."

The Frenchman sat gaping while the significance of Elton's disclosure filled his brain. The French had been on a hot trail in Poppov's capture and had allowed themselves to be diverted. They had risked the safety of their secret agent at Moscow to check the story of Poppov's sick mother and overlooked entirely the vital information that was to be found in the very letter Gushko carried. They had blundered at a time when the trail was under their eyes. For, since Poppov came from the Russian detention camp at Troyes, it was evident Yussilov must have access to that camp; might be using it as his rendezvous while out of Paris.

"*Diable*, my Captain!" D'Auteuil exclaimed. "Our best experts in the codes examine these papers. Of their stupidity I shall make the report to Colonel l'Ourcq!"

"I'd not blame them, monsieur," Elton replied, without looking up from the Poppov letter. "I'm satisfied I would not have found Yussilov's trail except that I was certain it must be here. Besides, I'm convinced there is neither code nor cipher in the message."

Elton studied the top of D'Auteuil's desk and smoked a cigaret. The Frenchman, respecting Elton's preoccupation, rose to walk the floor. That listing of Allied leaders in the Poppov letter, Elton reasoned, conveyed some sinister meaning to the Imperial secret service at Spa. What? When he rose the lines of his jaw were taut.

"I believe I begin to see what Yussilov is doing in France, monsieur," he announced.

"The message, you have solved it?" D'Auteuil demanded breathlessly.

"I'm not quite positive. And my own suspicions—I should hesitate to express them without some further investigation. But the important thing for us to consider is Yussilov's trail, monsieur. If I'm right, nothing is more important than catching that rascal with the least possible delay!"

"Poppov, we can have him here in two hours. At the camp at Troyes we can center our best Russian agents!" D'Auteuil proposed excitedly. "A net we can spread at Troyes through which Yussilov—"

"Please remember, monsieur, that the only way we have of identifying Yussilov lies in the fact that he is sixty-seven and

three-eighths inches high. All other facts of his appearance he seems able to conceal at will. And as for sending Guijot there to identify him, that might prove fatal. We've got to hold Guijot out until we're sure of our quarry. Do you agree that with the slightest misstep any advantage we now hold over Yussilov is gone?"

"Yes, my Captain. But the Russian's trail? If it is so hot, what is it the Captain propose?"

"For today, nothing, unless there should be new developments. In the morning at ten I should like to drive with you to Orléans where my chief, Colonel Rand, is to be decorated with the Legion of Honor."

"Yes, my Captain, I can understand the sentiment," said D'Auteuil, in astonishment at Elton's proposal. "But is it discreet, my Captain, that we lose the time? If Yussilov strike—"

"Oh, I have considerably more than sentiment in mind, monsieur," Elton rejoined smilingly. "If my theory of Yussilov's purpose in France is correct, our trip to Orléans may be very much worthwhile. And besides, in going to Orléans, we can drive by way of Troyes. I'd like to look at that Russian camp."

UNTIL late afternoon Elton remained at D'Auteuil's desk, seeming to be no better occupied than in looking out the window. In checking over in his mind the case of Yussilov he saw clearly the insuperable difficulties ahead, despite the tangible trail that lay uncovered. The messages betrayed the Russian's presence and possible purpose without giving more than a hint of his whereabouts. Even if using the Russian camp near Troyes as a rendezvous, it was clear that Yussilov would spend little time there. Before closing in on the camp, therefore, it would be necessary to know when Yussilov was there. And that information might be as difficult to discover as Yussilov's Paris addresses.

Elton rejected the possibility of coming upon Yussilov by some fortunate chance in checking the hundreds of Russian suspects in Paris. The French gendarmes were merely putting the Muscovite phantom on his mettle with their daily dragnets. In fact, no usual procedure of counter-espionage operations offered much hope in a case against so resourceful a spy, of whom little more was known tangibly than his height. As for hauling a daily army of suspects before Guijot for possible identification, that was physically impossible.

But there was the hope that Gushko might have some hint of Yussilov's Paris haunts. At five o'clock Elton estimated that the prisoner must have had ample time to decide his course. He had the Russian brought in and seated opposite him at D'Auteuil's desk.

"I am not going to equivocate with you, monsieur," Elton announced without preliminary. "Answer me at once your choice of destination—Switzerland or Vincennes!"

Gushko had hulked into the room without looking up, his humor seeming to be that same stubborn silence in which he had gone back to his cell. But as Elton spoke, the fellow looked up, leaned across the desk and met Elton's eyes.

"I confess nothing, monsieur," he said warily. "But you spoke of wishing to find the Russian named Yussilov. Of such a man I know nothing, monsieur. But—" an insinuating cunning sparkled in his black eyes—"perhaps it is I can help you find such a man, my friend; though if I do, how am I to know it will prove to my own advantage?"

"At least, you have nothing to lose," Elton reminded. "As matters now stand your life isn't worth a Czarist ruble. So you'll agree that a gamble is worth something. And I'll promise you on the official honor of the American Government to deliver you personally at Geneva within twenty-four hours after we land Yussilov."

Gushko's eyes shone at this assurance.

"On Wednesday, at four o'clock, monsieur, please have for me the uniform of the French gendarme," he proposed with blunt directions, rubbing his hands together. "I will also wish for the taxicab, and the means with which to disguise my face."

"So you've decided to do the laughing over Yussilov's grave, eh?"

"I do not understand, monsieur." Gushko gave a sly laugh. "Nothing do I know of Yussilov; have I not said so? Nothing do I tell. But—the monsieur please will have ready my passports for Switzerland; and perhaps this Yussilov will entertain the messieurs at Vincennes."

EARLY in the morning Elton left with D'Auteuil for the decoration bee at Orléans. Their hopes now centered on Gushko; but since the Russian had fixed Wednesday for his coup, Elton insisted on making use of the intervening day to his own purpose. Gushko had told nothing, had made the pact only by implication. But Elton was convinced the fellow planned no subterfuge. Gushko's reactions were too convincing of a lust to strike back at his betrayer.

They passed by military police headquarters to pick up Sergeant Walters, who climbed into the seat beside the French chauffeur. To D'Auteuil's adroit attempts to learn exactly what lay behind the junket, Elton was evasive. Nothing might come of it, he admitted. Or a great deal. No, he hardly expected to find Yussilov at Orléans. But there might be information, provided Elton's theory of Yussilov was not all awry.

They had breakfast at Troyes and proceeded south toward Orléans on the main Troyes-Orléans road, which took them past the Russian detention camp. There were many Russians working on the roadway, filling ruts torn by heavy trucks en route from supply depots to the Front. Elton directed that the auto pass the camp without slowing down. No slightest show of official interest must be made. He merely glanced at the camp as they whirred by and scanned the resultant mental picture at his leisure.

The camp of rough wooden barracks covered an acre or more. It was hedged in by the wall of barbed wire that D'Auteuil had described. But the entrance was twenty feet wide and unguarded. From D'Auteuil Elton learned that the Russians were kept under French military guard while at work, and were checked in and out each day by interned Russian officers in French pay. These officers had seen to it that there were few escapes and little disorder. Each night at ten the single entrance was put under military guard and no one was allowed to come or go without written authority.

"As I have said, my Captain," said D'Auteuil, "of everything that happen among the Russians we have the information. Drasneff, who have charge, was our most trusted agent; and not even Poppov could have escape if Drasneff was—"

D'Auteuil broke off and stared at Elton under the impulse of a sudden thought.

"*Mon dieu*, my Captain, I have been most blind! *Diable*—and Drasneff die very suddenly ten days ago at Troyes. We think his death it is of the heart attack! But not until this minute do I suspect the truth. Drasneff was the big, hearty Russian and not yet forty. No, my Captain, not the man to die of his heart!"

"An interesting and valuable bit of corroboration, monsieur. Of Yussilov's propensity for destroying those who get in his way, we had plenty of information. But this seems to verify his personal interest in Troyes and his tentacles in that camp."

"Then, my Captain, is it not the mistake if we fail to have our trusted Russians on the *qui vive* for Yussilov? That we do not fix our eyes upon this hole before another hour?"

"I'd advise strongly against anything

of the sort, monsieur. In fact, I'd like to have your promise that you will mention these matters to no one, not even Colonel l'Ourcq. The farther we can keep away from that Russian camp the better—at least until we know just what we are about."

"As you wish, my Captain." D'Auteuil shrugged.

A BATTALION was drawn up in the public square fronting the Hôtel de Ville at Orléans. The building was hung with Allied flags and the street was jammed with people in holiday dress. A military band serenaded while waiting for the heroes to come forth for decoration at the hands of General Pétain, commander of French armies, who had sped in from the Front. Elton went with Walters to a point of vantage overlooking the ceremony from the steps of the Hôtel de Ville; D'Auteuil sought out the French commandant to pay his respects.

Bugles shrilled attention at ten o'clock, and the guests of honor filed impressively out of the city hall, Colonel Rand among them. Elton's eyes, which had been searching the crowd, centered upon an Italian officer who began pointing with his riding crop to the distinguished guests as they passed him. The Italian's actions were not unusual; but they were unnecessary and in bad taste, inasmuch as he might have indicated less ostentatiously those whom he was pointing out to others in the crowd about him.

"Sure, sir," Walters spoke up at seeing Rand, "if anybody deserves decorating in our section, it's the Cap'n. All the colonel ever does is find fault, fuss and get credit for the Cap'n's fine work. I'm getting no kick out of this little show."

"Thanks, Walters," Elton responded without looking at his assistant. "But we're down here hoping to see something more interesting than the colonel's decoration. I want you to take a good look at that little Italian officer, the one standing in front of the crowd, just to the right of that old cannon."

"Yes, sir, I've got him spotted," said Walters.

Elton saw only the Italian as the ceremony proceeded. The troops were brought to attention. The band played the French national air. An adjutant read the citation in a piping sing-song. General Pétain stepped forward, hung the cross of commander about the neck of the Belgian general and pinned on the lesser grades of the other officers. As General Pétain faced about, the Italian pointed him out, using his riding crop again.

"Have you noted anything peculiar about that fellow, Walters?" Elton inquired.

"Nothing special, sir. He flirts that riding stick around a whole lot, but not a false move have I seen."

"I may have to do some fast apologizing for it, Walters, but I want you to bring that officer into the Hôtel de Ville. Move down there behind him now. As soon as the crowd breaks, hurry him in to me at the town major's office. Be as polite as possible."

Elton had barely time to arrange, with D'Auteuil's aid, for use of the office before Walters appeared with his man in tow. The Italian was in high dudgeon, burning with outraged dignity and lavish in French invective.

"But it is the outrage, messieurs!" he stormed in French. "*Diable*, I am manhandled by this ruffian, who speaks to me in no language I can understand. So he caught me by the arm and forced me to come with him. Messieurs, as an officer of the Italian crown, I demand the explanation!"

"If you are an Italian officer, monsieur," said Elton quietly, "you will have no serious objections if the American Intelligence Service has made a miscalculation. At least, monsieur, we have acted only for the common best interests; and if I have blundered, you will receive the most profound apology. Now, monsieur, if you please will sit down and be so good as to let me have your riding crop."

The officer declined a chair and yielded his crop with a protest against the indignity. Elton ignored the complaint and excused himself from the room, leaving the Italian to Walters and D'Auteuil. When he returned, nearly an hour later, the outraged officer confronted him with an icy demand for instant release.

"Of course, monsieur," said Elton, "provided you will be good enough to explain just why you carry a trick camera concealed in the knob of your riding crop."

The suspect took the crop with a fine show of pained surprise and examined the camera mechanism.

"But this is to me the great surprise, monsieur," he protested. "This riding crop, I have owned it for many years." He turned it over and over critically, then looked up as if shocked by a sudden discovery. "*Mon dieu, messieurs,* I see it but this instant! Ah, it is not my crop but one that must have been exchanged by error this morning when I dined at the hotel in Troyes."

"That might easily have happened, monsieur," Elton agreed. "But the photographs which I have had developed were taken during the ceremony, monsieur. And I distinctly saw you pointing at the persons in question. Perhaps you will be good enough to explain that."

Elton's suspect was thoroughly self-possessed as he faced this crisis. He looked coolly back at Elton, smiled slightly and shrugged.

"I presume I owe the apology, monsieur. But it is the truth that while it is the violation of orders to carry the camera, I have yielded to a little whim of my own. There is nothing more to say. Please to remember I have taken only the photographs of our brave Allies, which could do no harm. These I suppose you will wish to confiscate with my riding crop. I am sorry, monsieur, and trust you will not embarrass me at the Italian Mission."

"Not at the Italian Mission, monsieur," said Elton. "They probably would have no special interest in a Russian disguised in Italian uniform. I rather expected Yussilov to be represented here today, but I didn't expect his representative to be quite so conspicuous!"

The suspect met this charge with a magnificent unconcern, his face wholly unruffled as he looked back at Elton. Shortly the corners of his mouth curled in a cynical smile, and a glitter crept into his gray eyes as he estimated his captor and accepted the uselessness of further equivocation. But there was a light in his eyes that warned Elton against some desperate impulse playing in the back of the man's mind.

"I presume, if such are your thoughts, I am to expect little consideration at your hands, monsieur," he said curtly.

"On the contrary, if you are sensible, there is a great deal you may expect," Elton insinuated. "Yussilov, not you, is the one with whom we would greatly prefer to deal."

The cynical smile deepened into a sneer. Elton caught the play of sinister lights under the other's contracted lids. He saw the prisoner's hand creep to the pocket of his blouse. And he saw the alert Walters, immediately behind, grip the butt of a holstered Service pistol. The Russian inserted only thumb and finger into his pocket and quickly withdrew them.

"My answer, monsieur," he sneered, "is that of a gentleman who knows how to guard his lips against those who would betray him."

Although Elton caught the Russian's purpose and sprang toward him, he was too late to prevent the tragedy. With a deft movement the Russian thrust his fingers to his mouth. As the others closed in on him the man collapsed to the floor in the clutches of death. A surgeon was hurried in from an adjoining office. The Russian was dead. Some swift poison, the doctor said. Doubtless a cyanide.

D'Auteuil berated himself roundly.

"*Diable!* It is the ancient trick of the Russian, my Captain!" he complained.

"It is that I should have been on the *qui vive.* Yussilov once more have cheat us!"

"No particular damage done, monsieur," said Elton, shaking his head soberly. "Nothing would have come of sweating that Russian. But he's already told me what I most wanted to know; and I think, monsieur, we'd better be getting back to Paris."

ON THE run to the French metropolis Elton was wrapped in thought. He roused himself as they approached Troyes only long enough to make another appraisal of the Russian camp as they sped past.

"I am the most curious, my Captain," the Frenchman said insistently as they neared Paris. "You said the Russian told you what you most wish to know. Perhaps, before we reach the bureau, you may wish to take me into the confidence?"

Elton roused himself and lighted a cigaret.

"Yes, I think you should know," he agreed. "This incident at Orléans confirms something I have suspected for some time, but hesitated to put into words for fear I might be wrong. The pictures the Russian took were of General Pétain, the Belgian chief-of-staff and Colonel Rand—just those three. Colonel Rand receives full credit for what his operatives achieve. The high value of General Pétain and the Belgian general, I need not explain. Recalling the Poppov letter, do the facts I've recounted give you my idea?"

D'Auteuil thought briefly and shrugged.

"It means that Poppov's letter conveyed to Imperial headquarters a partial list of those of our great leaders who are marked for Yussilov's tender little touch, monsieur," Elton said grimly. "Piecing everything together, can't you see that our Slav shadow is patiently assembling his facts and setting his stage for a grand coup to rid the Allies of their ablest leaders? Isn't that his whole past history. Didn't the Czar play that game, and the Reds afterward?"

D'Auteuil gripped Elton's arm excitedly.

"It is most plain, my Captain! And I think only of the danger to the munition plants! *Diable,* that there is such a monster!"

"The unhappy part of it all," Elton reflected, "is that, bizarre as his scheme may sound, Yussilov might be able to carry it to dangerous lengths. And if he should succeed, even in part, the consequences are apparent."

D'Auteuil, leaning tensely forward, rode a long time in grim silence.

"My Captain," he announced presently, "it is necessary that of this development I make the full report to Colonel l'Ourcq, the chief of my bureau. The consequence of silence, it is too serious."

"I agree that we must make our report," Elton replied. "But let us argue against a general alarm or action that might drive Yussilov closer to cover until we've tried for him tomorrow with our man, Gushko."

COLONEL L'OURCQ was a round faced little man of mild, cheerful countenance, who looked anything but head of the French secret service bureau. He listened in stolid patience, without change of expression, to D'Auteuil's amazing report of the Yussilov developments. When D'Auteuil had finished he asked several simple questions in an unflustered voice and made his own estimate immediately, in a few terse sentences.

"Of Yussilov's mission, I agree with your deductions, messieurs," he announced. "The general alarm, in such a case it is most necessary. But our immediate hopes are in this Gushko, of which opportunity you must lay careful plans. If Gushko should fail, then we must take the supreme precautions to guard the lives of our leaders and hunt Yussilov openly with every avail-

able force. For the time, messieurs, I shall make no change in your own plans. The entire facilities of the bureau are at your disposal, but I shall want to keep personally in touch with every development."

As a preliminary to completing plans for the morrow, they had Gushko brought from his cell for further interrogation. Colonel l'Ourcq conducted the examination, pressing Gushko particularly for details of his feud with Yussilov. But the Russian was adamant in keeping his own counsel, though he brimmed with confidence at his ability to cope with his countryman in his own way.

"The passports, messieurs, I will require them before the sunset of tomorrow," Gushko boasted, rubbing his hands and looking from one to another with an insinuating glitter in his eyes. "But please that you do not press me with questions which I must refuse to answer!"

"Do you not think, Monsieur Gushko," L'Ourcq persisted, "that complete frankness would serve us all the better? Our only thought is to be of the greatest help to you in what you propose. I might add that I am vested with the fullest authority to bargain with you. My own recommendation in your case will be accepted as final. And I am also empowered to supply you with funds as you leave France—say twenty thousand francs—when we have Yussilov in our hands."

Gushko's wide mouth spread in a crafty smile.

"But would the Colonel have me say many things I might regret?" he said pointedly. "If, as you have said, Yussilov is the sly fox, is it not possible that I might fail, even though I do not think so?"

"Our case against you needs no improvement," L'Ourcq reminded with a significant smile.

Gushko pursed his thick lips, shrugged indifference at the thrust and changed the subject.

"But you bring me to a subject upon which I must ask your official pledge, monsieur. If I am to succeed tomorrow it is because I go to my countrymen who can help me. They are innocent of any wrong and do not know such a man as Yussilov—by that name. So, if you are to follow me, I must know that my comrades will not fall into your net."

"Before I can agree to that it is only fair that I know what you plan to do," L'Ourcq stipulated.

"Certainly, it is very simple," said Gushko with the assurance of one who has thought long and carefully of his plans. "I will take the taxicab from your bureau and drive to a point in Paris for rendezvous with my friends, who are innocent Russian refugees. Upon leaving them, which I shall do at once, I shall drive on my way to find for you the man, Yussilov. Where? As to that we must wait and see, messieurs. As to how you follow me, that is for your discretion. But you will remember that such a man as Yussilov—as you describe him—he is not to be caught asleep. *Voilà!*"

Gushko got to his feet with abrupt finality.

"There is nothing more I will say, messieurs! But please now give me your solemn pledge that innocent Russians will not be molested by the agents of the Allies."

Colonel l'Ourcq studied Gushko as if estimating the possibility of further inquisition. He decided shortly.

"Very well; you have my official word," he agreed. "We will press you no further tonight, monsieur. And, on thinking it over, I will pay you twenty-five thousand francs, which you will receive as you pass our frontier into Geneva."

As Gushko, his beefy face grimly radiant, was taken back to his cell Colonel l'Ourcq rose.

"The details I shall leave in your hands, messieurs," he addressed Elton and D'Auteuil. "You may draw upon the bureau for all its personnel and

funds, and may use Lieutenant Guijot, if it suits your purpose. It is unnecessary for me to add that nothing is of more urgent concern to the Allied cause in the present moment than your success tomorrow. *Adieu, messieurs.*"

The two officers sat at D'Auteuil's desk and worked out their plans with little debate. They would take the responsibility in their own hands rather than risk the stir of a score of operatives. When Gushko was freed to leave the bureau by taxicab, they would follow in one of the bureau's specially camouflaged cabs, one whose driver was skilled in trailing vehicles through heavy traffic. Dressed in civilian attire, they would follow closely Gushko's every move and depend upon their wits to meet the emergency of Yussilov when it arose.

L'Ourcq's proffer of the use of Guijot they rejected after weighing its advantages against the danger. Guijot was safe in his present isolation in an upper floor of the Palace of Justice, guarded by a sergeant of French cavalry from Guijot's former regiment. Only five persons in all Paris knew of Guijot's presence in the city: L'Ourcq, Elton, D'Auteuil, Madame Guijot and Guijot's trusted sergeant. He was being held against the day of Yussilov's identification. And as the last man in France who could be counted upon for that important function before a general court-martial, no risk must be taken, they agreed.

Having completed their plan, Elton and D'Auteuil sat through most of the night reading the sheaves of Intelligence reports and secret police summaries in search of some transient straw. Hotels, boulevards, cafés and theaters still were under close observation by discreet secret agents. But there came no remote hint of Yussilov. After a few hours of sleep, the two resumed this occupation through the forenoon.

The day wore on without development. L'Ourcq looked in on them shortly before three o'clock, returned their nods, studied their faces for a moment and left without speaking—his most eloquent way of proclaiming his confidence and extending them carte blanche in their pending adventure.

At three o'clock Gushko was brought from his cell and allowed to prepare his masquerade in D'Auteuil's office. The Russian's face was flushed with optimism. In response to D'Auteuil's final questions Gushko merely shrugged. When the Russian had completed his disguise as a gendarme he surveyed himself in D'Auteuil's mirror with critical satisfaction. A very workman-like black beard covered his jowls and concealed his thick lips. A few touches of gray pigment broke the straight, heavy lines of his brows, while a wig changed the sluggish contour of his head. But Elton noted that Gushko's muscular, bear-like body was not disguised by the trim uniform.

In delivering to Gushko a military wristwatch, automatic pistol and fifty francs for emergency use, D'Auteuil gave the Russian a final admonition against treachery.

"But do the messieurs think of me that I am a fool!" Gushko retorted. He added with a leering smile, "Escape is impossible, perhaps. But the passports for Switzerland and the twenty-five thousand francs—already do I feel them in the pocket of my waistcoat. Very well, messieurs, I am ready! Remember the pledge. And when I enter the first building, you will remain far behind. But when for the second time I enter a place, you will come quickly and with the greatest discretion."

THEY allowed Gushko fifteen minutes' start, since the cab he used, driven by an agent of the bureau, was to circle to the south, cross the Seine and return by a route that would bring him in sight of D'Auteuil's vehicle at the intersection of the Rue de Rivoli with the Rue du Louvre. Elton and D'Auteuil waited without display of their inner restlessness. Both were convinced, from their observation of Gushko, that the Russian

was attempting no subterfuge. The fellow's intense confidence must be based upon something tangible. Doubtless, out of the welter of Russian intrigue, he knew where to find the hidden trail that would lead him to the Muscovite phantom's presence, and his own release.

D'Auteuil's eyes were fixed upon his watch, carefully waiting for the exact moment of departure, now close at hand, when an orderly of the bureau told him to take a message from the private wire. D'Auteuil motioned the orderly out of the room, closed the door and took a receiver from one of the drawers of his desk. He talked briefly in French, then rose and faced Elton with anxious perplexity.

"It is from the Palace of Justice," he announced in an undertone. "Lieutenant Guijot send the message that I am to come to him at once."

"An unfortunate time for his call, monsieur," said Elton. "Did he give you any intimation of what he wanted?"

"Nothing, my Captain. It was his sergeant who call, and he is most careful with his words. But he say it is of the great urgency."

Elton scowled at his watch.

"We must leave immediately, monsieur. Our time is up. Under the circumstances, there is nothing to do but send some good operative from the bureau to find what Guijot has on his mind."

"Guijot send the message that I must come, and not some one else, my Captain." D'Auteuil threw off his indecision suddenly and turned to the door. "But it is impossible at this moment, so Guijot he must wait! Come, we must make haste to find Gushko's taxicab."

They picked up Gushko's vehicle as they came to the Rue du Louvre and trailed it east along the Rue de Rivoli through the heavy traffic of the heart of Paris and on through a network of streets to the disreputable Rue Pigalle, a narrow thoroughfare of many twists and turns. Gushko stopped in front of a rambling old stone building, the lower part of which was occupied by dingy stores, the upper two floors consisting of cheap apartments. The Russian disappeared inside, while Elton and D'Auteuil, holding to their pledge, remained some distance away, entering a small curio store and making a minor purchase to avoid attention. Any uneasiness of a possible sly trick on the Russian's part was dissipated when Gushko reappeared shortly and drove off, circling back to the Rue de Rivoli and driving rapidly west across Paris to a point near the Place du Palais-Royal, where he left the cab at the curb and proceeded afoot.

Elton and D'Auteuil left their own car and followed closely. Gushko's rapid pace and firm tread told them that he moved toward a definite objective. Certainly the Russian would not choose such a place as this for an attempt at escape. Their pulses quickened to the chase. Gushko appeared to be headed for the nearby Hôtel Continental. Was Yussilov entrenched there? They pressed discreetly closer, taking care to give no show of their purpose.

The swift climax that followed was enacted under their eyes, within fifty paces. It came without warning, an unexpected blow that they saw in a blur. Gushko hesitated at a crowded street intersection. A gendarme stepped up to him, touched him on the arm and turned away. Gushko reeled, half turned and, clutching at his breast, pitched to the sidewalk. By the time Elton and D'Auteuil reached his side, Gushko was writhing in the last throes of death.

Elton, keeping clear of the swirl of excited pedestrians, turned quickly down an intersecting street into which the mysterious gendarme had vanished. But there was no trace of the shadow, no one among the bystanders who remembered seeing the mysterious gendarme who had accosted Gushko. Elton turned back to D'Auteuil, accepting the uselessness of action at the moment.

"The Russian is dead," D'Auteuil reported in an awed whisper as he turned with Elton toward their cab. The

Frenchman's face was ashen, not from the spectacle of violent death, but because of the tragedy's sinister implication. "Yussilov strike before our very eyes, and nothing do I see!"

THEY drove at once to the Deuxième Bureau. D'Auteuil insisted that he must report to Colonel l'Ourcq in a matter of such serious consequence. The colonel heard the details with his usual sang-froid. Since Elton argued against personally seeking the trail in the Rue Pigalle, D'Auteuil sent four other agents, with orders to round up every person found in the building that Gushko had visited. All agreed that Gushko must have been betrayed by the person to whom he appealed for help in the Rue Pigalle. The colonel also ordered a dragnet over the Hôtel Continental and a reenforcement of the vigil throughout Paris.

"No longer is it possible that we wait!" L'Ourcq announced with decision. "This Yussilov has shown the mischief he can make. The lives of our great men are no longer safe. I will go at once and organize personally for their safety!"

Elton wrote down on his chart the developments of the past two days. He admitted to himself that, with all the evidence Yussilov had left behind, the phantom Muscovite still held a loose rein. And Yussilov had demonstrated his ability to put into effect the devilish mission upon which he had come to Paris. L'Ourcq might surround the Allied leaders with an army of guards to protect their every movement day and night, yet such a man as Yussilov would find some way through with his deadly cyanides.

While D'Auteuil paced nervously back and forth, Elton thoughtfully estimated the present situation and checked it against a plan of action that had been crystallizing in his mind for two days. It was the one move that appeared to offer hope of success against the Russian. In his plan all depended upon choosing the right moment in which to spring his trap. Slowly he decided against putting it into effect now. A better hour might present itself when L'Ourcq began beating his tomtoms over the whole of Paris and drove Yussilov to cover.

"*Mon dieu*, my captain, but in our excitement we have forgot!" D'Auteuil said suddenly. "Lieutenant Guijot—it is hours since he have called!"

"You'll never find a better time than now," Elton approved. "And I'd like to go with you, if you don't mind. Perhaps there is something Guijot can tell us about Yussilov that will be of help later."

"I will call the cab immediately," said D'Auteuil.

They drove east on the Rue de Rivoli to the Place du Chatelet and crossed on the Pont au Change to the Palace of Justice on the great island of the Seine. A gendarme checked their official identification cards before admitting them to the building. A second gendarme challenged them as they mounted the stairs, then escorted them to the bureau of his superior. There D'Auteuil was recognized by Guijot's sergeant, who piloted them through winding corridors to the room where Guijot was held in hiding behind barred doors.

Guijot turned to them with feverish impatience as they were admitted. He was a trim little officer, who gave an instant impression of brimming energy and volatile emotions. His cheeks were flushed under his olive skin and his black eyes were snapping.

He complained, without formality of greeting:

"I have waited through the eternity. I am here a prisoner, and am helpless while important work demands my attention!"

"Calm yourself, Guijot," D'Auteuil said bruskly. "I came as soon as it was possible. What has happened to put you in such a humor as this?"

"Madame Guijot came to me three hours ago with the information, my

Lieutenant," Guijot replied, his words a rapid staccato. "She brought the information that my great friend, Captain Quartres, has come to Paris with the Belgian Mission which is quartered at the Hôtel Wagram. Ah, but you must not censure madame for admitting to Quartres that I am in the city! She knows what close comrades we are and that often we have worked together on the secret missions. She caution Quartres that it is a great secret, so Quartres send by madame the message that I am to call upon him tonight at the hour of nine to meet the General Jacques, who is in Paris on an important errand. And I am to tell no one of the meeting, which must be as secret as my own presence in Paris!"

As he told this, the color rose in Guijot's flushed face and his voice grew shrill with excitement.

"I am sorry, Lieutenant Guijot, that you called me on such a matter," D'Auteuil said testily. "But how well you know the orders of Colonel l'Ourcq that you are not to risk yourself! Of the skill of Yussilov we have had fresh evidence within the past hour."

"But do you not perceive my meaning, Lieutenant d'Auteuil?" cried Guijot. "Are my words not clear to you? If Quartres is the one who call, why should he suspect I am in Paris when so well does he know that I am in Holland. Do you not see it all?"

D'Auteuil turned ashen as he caught Guijot's meaning.

He gasped.

"I see it now. The Russian spider has laid his web for you, Lieutenant Guijot, as he did for Lebre and Fernand-Loriot. But why did you not get this word to us instantly?"

"Did I not call on the very moment!" Guijot retorted. Twenty kilometers I have marched in this chamber within the time I have waited for you. And now there is left less than two hours in which I can lay my plans to meet this Russian at his game!"

D'Auteuil eyed his brother officer with open incredulity.

"You propose to go to the Wagram, Lieutenant Guijot? But that is impossible!"

"It is my duty, Lieutenant! I shall insist."

"It is the order of Colonel l'Ourcq that your life is too valuable. Who else is there left to identify Yussilov—which is the very reason the Russian has set this trap?"

"I resent such words, my Lieutenant!" Guijot retorted hotly. "Yussilov is the dangerous enemy of France. He has killed my good friends—Lebre and Fernand-Loriot. And now when it is within my power to meet this monster I demand the right to do my duty. I will appeal at once to Colonel l'Ourcq."

If D'Auteuil thought this insubordination, he ignored the other's temper and turned to the window for a moment. Elton held his own counsel. It was for the French to decide whether Guijot should take the risk. Shortly D'Auteuil decided.

"The matter, Lieutenant Guijot, shall be placed before the colonel," he announced. "It is he who shall decide. And since the hour grows late, I will assume the responsibility of taking you at once at the Deuxième Bureau."

L'OURCQ was stirred to a momentary show of excitement at hearing Guijot's report of the mysterious summons. He listened without comment to Guijot's demand that he be released to keep the rendezvous. Then the colonel cautiously set the wheels of inquiry moving preliminary to a decision. He called the prefect of police on his private wire. From that office the startling information came back to L'Ourcq's ears that the Belgian Mission was quartered at the Wagram. General Jacques was in Paris, at the Wagram, and with him Captain Quartres. The Belgian official party occupied a suite on the second floor, the identical suite to which Guijot was bidden.

L'Ourcq hung up with a shrug.

"The invitation you received, Lieutenant Guijot," he said stiffly, "appears to have been bona fide!"

Guijot was taken aback for only a moment; then he sprang from his chair.

"But that is impossible, my Colonel!" he protested. "It is less than a week since I talked with Captain Quartres in Holland, and to him I complained that not in months will I see Paris. Ah, and have I not reasoned this all out while I waited? Was not Captain Quartres on duty in Berne when I worked with Yussilov for the neck of Lenin? Is the trap not clear, my Colonel?"

Colonel l'Ourcq sat looking at Guijot for some time, during which he changed his mind if not his expression. He reached for a telephone, took down the receiver, then hung it up without placing a call.

"No, messieurs, it is not discreet to call the Wagram," he announced. "If this is the work of Yussilov, we must act with the greatest delicacy. Lieutenant Guijot, I grant your request. You may keep the rendezvous. The details you will arrange with Lieutenant D'Auteuil, who will report them to me for my approval. Please act with great promptness, messieurs, since there is little time remaining."

Elton's thoughts had been occupied for some time with the invasion of the Belgian suite at the Hôtel Wagram. From the first he had believed the mysterious summons came from the phantom Muscovite. That it tied in with the official Belgian party might be explained in several ways. Yussilov might have worked his way into Belgian confidence. Or, more probably, he might plan such a setting for the death of Guijot while the Belgian party was absent at theater or café.

Elton outlined his plan as soon as L'Ourcq left the room. Guijot, undisguised and carrying a weapon in his overcoat pocket, would drive to the Wagram and go direct to the Belgian suite at nine. Elton would precede Guijot to the hotel, secure lodgings and so arrange his movements as to be passing the Belgian door as Guijot entered. Thus, if Yussilov were inside, he would face two able and armed agents without warning. After that, events must shape themselves. L'Ourcq could follow with a heavy escort of gendarmes to surround the hotel when it was too late for Yussilov to receive warning.

L'Ourcq gave prompt approval, and, with less than an hour remaining, the plan was set in motion: watches synchronized, movements charted, transportation and police reserves requisitioned. Elton left as soon as he could get into his American uniform. He drove, by a roundabout course, to a point on the Rue de Rivoli, several squares from the Wagram, and transferred to a commercial cab which took him to the Wagram, riding crop looped over his wrist, musette bag at his shoulder, his manner that of a typical junior officer in Paris for a lark.

At the desk of the Wagram he asked many questions of the theaters and night life of Paris, registered, got his room assignment and went upstairs. His room was on the third floor. Guijot was due in fifteen minutes. When he had only ten seconds left, Elton passed down to the second floor and started along the carpeted hallway past the Belgian suite. Guijot, with superb coordination, appeared at the precise instant and rapped at the Belgian door.

The door opened promptly, just as Elton came up. He turned sharply as the Frenchman started in, and entered at Guijot's elbow. They were received by a thin, stooped man in the garb of a butler, who evinced no surprise at Elton's precipitate entrance.

"Messieurs, Captain Quartres is expecting you," the servant said in French. "Please, I will take the hats of the messieurs."

Elton's eye swept the room as he entered, every sense alert for unexpected attack. The butler was alone—a frail, colorless fellow of grayish pallor, fur-

rowed brow, and dull, lusterless eyes. Guijot was surrendering his cap to the servant when tragedy sprang upon them with the same sinister swiftness that had struck down Gushko on the crowded streets a few hours before. An intuition, a sudden leap of his nerves from no visible warning, saved Elton. He leaped backward under this intuitive impulse as the butler's extended hand was reaching for his cap and struck out at the hand with the full force of his riding crop.

The blow fell across the fellow's wrist. Developments followed in a devastating jumble which Elton's trained mind and perfectly coordinated nerves translated into instant counter-action. His blow unseated his antagonist's grip and his eye caught the glitter of a metallic cylinder falling to the floor. In that same blur of moving events he saw Guijot stagger, clutch at the air and topple, victim of the hand that had taken his cap. He knew the man before him was Yussilov, even before his mind caught the transition in the fellow's eyes and face.

The Russian, disarmed and unmasked by the blow across the wrist, was backing away when Elton plucked a pistol from his coat pocket. But Yussilov's faculties were not failing him as he retreated toward an open door at the rear of the room. His eyes were fixed upon Elton with a dancing alertness as he backed slowly, a step at a time, crouched like a boxer avoiding attack. Elton aimed.

No word was spoken by either. Yussilov's face told as clearly as words that he did not mean to surrender. He stooped low as the weapon swept in line with his head. Even as Elton pressed the trigger he was conscious that he had missed the plunging target. The Russian had thrown himself deftly to one side with a miraculous calculation. Three times Elton fired as the Russian bobbed back across the room with his uncanny skill and matchless self-possession. With the vibrations of the third shot, Yussilov dodged through an open door into an adjoining room. Elton, disregarding danger of a trap, dived into the room behind him. But he was barely in time to see the Russian disappear into a third room, slam and bolt the door behind him.

The hallway was filling with excited guests as Elton rushed out to cut off possible retreat there. L'Ourcq and D'Auteuil, with a detachment of gendarmes, dashed into the confusion and invaded the Belgian suite, battering down doors and searching every nook and closet. Fifty gendarmes had surrounded the hotel outside, with orders to let no one pass, L'Ourcq reported. But an hour of thorough search brought no clue. Yussilov had vanished again. Reluctantly L'Ourcq accepted defeat. He ordered Guijot's body removed and led the way back to the Deuxième Bureau.

REACHING the bureau, L'Ourcq forgot his savoir-faire and alternately walked the floor and bellowed orders to his assembled agents.

"I will put out the net through which even Yussilov can not escape!" he roared. "We will arrest every Russian in Paris and hold them until they tell! I will—"

He choked in the impotence of his passion and seized the private telephone that connected with the prefect of police. To that official he poured out orders. Every available gendarme must be thrown in at once to comb Paris. Russian refugees would be arrested wholesale on the Rue Pigalle. All suspicious characters among the Russians would be given the third degree. All Russian males measuring sixty-seven and three-eighths inches in height would be dispatched to the Deuxième Bureau for examination. Secret service police would be hurried to every depot and gate to cover all persons leaving Paris by train, automobile, carriage or afoot.

From this rapid fire of orders, L'Ourcq

turned to D'Auteuil.

"Our own Russian agents at Troyes and Orléans—you will throw them into the Russian camp at Troyes," he commanded. "Notify the commandant at Troyes by telephone to patrol all roads!"

Elton had been sitting to one side absorbed in his own analysis of the situation. But at hearing L'Ourcq's command to D'Auteuil he stepped anxiously forward.

"Colonel, I urge that you make no such move on the Russian camp at the present moment!" he pleaded.

"My net, it shall leave nothing to chance!" L'Ourcq snapped.

"Yes, Colonel l'Ourcq, I agree," Elton persisted. "But for the Russian camp I ask your indulgence. If you will but allow me until tomorrow noon, I will be responsible for Troyes—with the help of Lieutenant D'Auteuil and one of my own men."

L'Ourcq, under the momentum his energies had attained, found difficulty in changing his mind. But he acceded presently to Elton's earnest pleas with a blunt shrug that relegated the Russian camp to a place of secondary importance in his own plans.

"As you please," he said indifferently, and turned to retract his orders.

Elton withdrew from the room, lest L'Ourcq change his mind. D'Auteuil accompanied him without enthusiasm. The lieutenant was stunned by the tragedy at the Wagram following so swiftly upon the affair of Gushko.

"Your plans?" D'Auteuil demanded as Elton requisitioned a French military sedan and went outside to wait for the car.

"First, I want to pick up my assistant, Sergeant Walters, at American M. P. headquarters," said Elton. "Then we drive to Troyes to confer with the garrison commander. In the morning, at daybreak, we enter the Russian camp in search of Yussilov."

D'Auteuil shrugged his misgivings.

"My Captain, the best spies are never caught," he said disconsolately. "Yussilov will find Paris comfortable enough. As to the Russian camp, we have lost our opportunity there, I fear."

"Perhaps so," said Elton. "But if Yussilov is as good a spy as I think he is, he'll drop out of Paris while the colonel's dragnet is at fever heat. Especially if my riding crop left a neat welt across his wrist, as I think it did."

"In a few hours Yussilov can dispose of the marks by skilful massage," D'Auteuil complained. "At Troyes we will find three hundred Russians, and do not most Russians look much alike? And Guijot, our last officer who could identify Yussilov, is dead!"

"But you'll agree, monsieur, that it is first necessary to locate Yussilov before he can be identified?" Elton rejoined. He smiled enigmatically. "It may be, since we seem powerless, that Yussilov will give us a bit of help in the matter of his identification. He has one little trick in his bag that looks to me like a possible liability."

D'Auteuil shrugged again and settled back in the cushions. The invasion of the Russian camp held no further interest for him, nor the vague plan indicated by the American. Troyes must be covered. But it was evident that D'Auteuil accepted this assignment as mere routine, a necessary gesture in what had become a fruitless search. Only a miracle could deliver Yussilov into Allied hands. Though D'Auteuil held his own counsel, his manner was eloquent of his thoughts.

The patient and dependable Walters was holding himself in readiness when Elton called. The sergeant, belted and armed, swung aboard with an easy salute and settled himself beside the driver. Troyes was reached by four o'clock. D'Auteuil roused the French commandant and repeated, in Colonel L'Ourcq's name, the instructions suggested by Elton.

Two companies of French infantry were to move on the Russian camp under cover of darkness, surround it by

daybreak and prevent any one from escaping through a rift in the wire. Two additional detachments were to be available to D'Auteuil. The first of these, twenty selected men, was to accompany him into the Russian camp. The second, of six men under a sergeant, was to station itself at a crossroads located some two hundred meters north of the Russian camp entrance. Its mission was to receive any prisoner that might be delivered by Elton.

These details thoroughly understood, Elton sought a convenient café in which to while away an hour over a belated supper.

D'Auteuil's passive interest was unchanged by Elton's preparations. To D'Auteuil, it seemed a conventional stopping-up of a fox hole in which there would be found no fox. Yussilov was hardly simple enough to permit himself to be identified by a bruised or lacerated wrist.

The troops had moved toward their positions long since when Elton proceeded toward the Russian camp. He left the car at the crossroads where the detachment was to wait. The poilus were there already, lying in their overcoats in the tangle of briar, willow and scrub oak that flanked the roads. After a critical survey of the terrain, Elton reentered the auto, looked at his watch and proceeded to the entrance of the Russian camp. A truck with the twenty selected poilus arrived from an intersecting road at the same moment. Elton launched his invasion with crisp instructions to D'Auteuil.

"Monsieur, please have three of your men guard this entrance. No one must leave or enter the camp while we are inside. The others of your men will follow us in. Direct them to assemble all Russians in ranks and methodically sort out every man who is of Yussilov's approximate height. We will wait at the detention camp headquarters until this is done."

"*Bien, monsieur,*" D'Auteuil assented without spirit.

THEY preempted the Russian headquarters shack and smoked in silence through the commotion of assembling and searching the Russian battalion. An hour passed before the French detachment commander reported. Behind him, under guard of his men, were eleven Russian soldiers of almost identical stature.

Elton cast his eye along the rank and saw their strange similarity of feature and appearance. All were unkempt, empty of eye, woebegone men without a country. On closer inspection he saw that there was no suspicious rift in the line of bronzed, wind burned faces. No man stood out in intelligence or other distinguishing characteristic. Any of them might be the man he had faced at the Wagram. From among the lot, after a close survey of their faces and figures, he selected one and ordered him taken inside. An inspection of the fellow's wrist showed no hint of telltale discoloration.

"Sergeant Walters," Elton instructed his assistant, without waiting to search or examine his suspect, "I direct you to deliver this important prisoner to the French sergeant whom you will find at the crossroads two hundred meters north of this camp. Do not let this man address you or approach you. Keep him moving. I needn't tell you that he is a very important prisoner."

"Yes, sir," said Walters with a snap of his jaws, and set the Russian moving with a stout shove.

"My Captain, I do not understand." D'Auteuil scowled, his interest finally stirred by Elton's unexplained action. "The prisoner—you suspect he is the henchman of Yussilov?"

"How are we to know, monsieur?" Elton replied laconically. "But first let us secure our prisoners so that we may examine them at our convenience." He added with a smile, "And if Yussilov himself is here, perhaps he will come to our assistance, monsieur."

"There is an excellent Russian inter-

preter upon whom we may depend most fully," D'Auteuil said with an undertone of annoyance at Elton's secrecy.

"For Yussilov, monsieur, we will not require an interpreter," Elton reminded enigmatically. "He speaks excellent French."

D'Auteuil shook his head, shrugged and settled back in offended dignity to a cigaret. Elton waited without speaking until Walters returned, then selected from the line a second Russian, examined his wrists and committed him to Walters's care for delivery to the French commander at the crossroads. A third and fourth Russian followed, a process that consumed the greater part of an hour. D'Auteuil had developed an open impatience by the time the fifth prisoner was started on his way.

"The time, my Captain, does it not have some value to us?" he spoke up, the barest shred of politeness left in his voice. "If the Russians are to be arrested, is it not the more prudent that our poilus march them all at once?"

"If our Muscovite phantom is not in our net here, monsieur," Elton replied, "perhaps I'll be ready to join you soon in saying that the best spies are never caught. As for Paris, the day is before us, and we have until noon to finish here, under your colonel's own instructions."

The Frenchman vented his feelings in another expressive shrug as he settled back in his chair. But a moment later he was shaken from his skeptical indifference by a rush of developments.

At the vibrations of a distant pistol shot, Elton sprang to his feet and ran from the room. A second shot rang out, followed by a third, fourth and fifth, fired at slow intervals. Elton was leaving the guarded entrance of the Russian camp by the time D'Auteuil, running at top speed, caught up with him. They saw groups of French soldiers from the detachment at the crossroads running toward Walters, who stood over a figure that lay threshing in the dust at the edge of the road. Walters turned to Elton as the two came up, his face tortured by a grim anxiety.

"Sorry, Cap'n," Walters reported.

"Tell me quickly just what happened, Walters!" Elton demanded.

"Wasn't anything else I could do, sir," said Walters, a defensive note in his voice. "My orders was to take him to the crossroads; and all of a sudden he turned and started jumping backward. I warned him three times, Cap'n, and then cut loose. Sure was a tough target, sir, the way he bobbed around. But I got him on the fifth shot!"

"How badly did you hit him, Sergeant?" Elton inquired.

"Through the chest, sir," Walters replied, swallowing hard. "I tried to be decent and just wing him. But when it got down to that fifth shot, and him still dodging off, I was taking no chances."

D'Auteuil turned excitedly to his soldiers and ordered that a surgeon be hurried by motor from Troyes. The Russian ceased his struggles and composed his face under these ministrations. His strength was ebbing rapidly from his thin body, the pale light of death filling his black eyes. But with a last spark of the sinister spirit in which he had lived, the Russian's face twisted in a mocking smile.

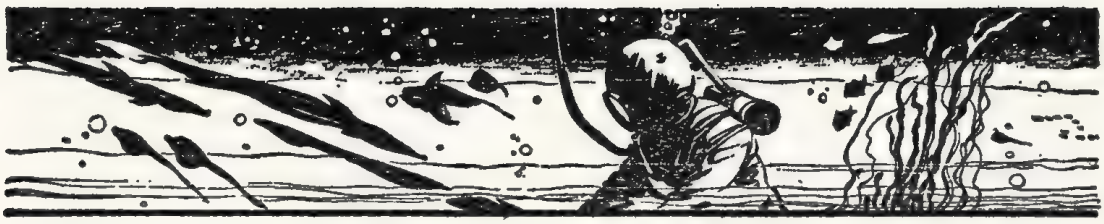
"The surgeon!" D'Auteuil cried impatiently. "We must hold him alive!"

Walters, unstrung by the French officer's unexplained commotion, turned uneasily to Elton.

"I hope, sir, I didn't do the wrong thing. My orders—"

Elton clapped the noncom's shoulder.

"A fine bit of work, Walters," he said softly, turning away from the dying Russian. "Your marksmanship confirmed my belief that this Slav would try that little bullet-dodging trick of his on the wrong man if we gave him the chance. If the Russian government's word is worth a hang, there's a Slav police commissar up in Moscow pining to pay you twenty-five thousand gold rubles for that fifth shot of yours."



Old Whee-e-e-e

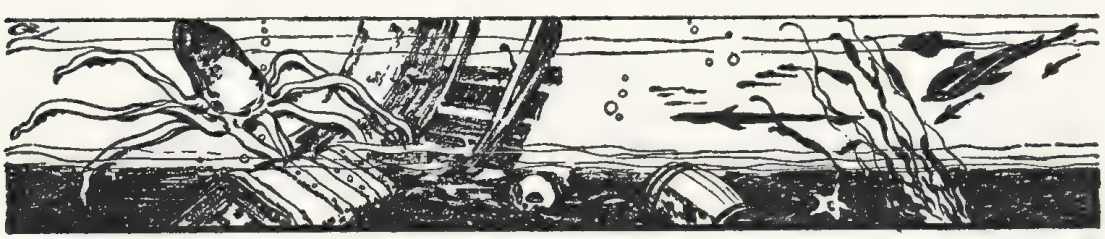
By CHARLES A. RAWLINGS

Author of "Dance of the Bends"

THE spongers were getting ready for sea again. September, the month that belongs to Old Whee-e-e-e, the hurricane, was gone. The October moon was waning. Dew glistened on the rigging at night. In the day the Florida sun was bright through air that seemed washed. The Anclote River sliding slowly by the anchorage down to the Gulf was as blue as the paint on the deckhouses. The boats slept beam to beam, nosed in to the long wharf. The shouts of seamen loading stores and slapping paint did not wake them. They dozed all they could, for they were small, the Gulf swell long, and there is no peace, as they well knew, off soundings.

The *Athene,* one of the deep-water boats, bent a new anchor hawser. Two seamen hauled it from the foredeck. It slid over the rail and along the wharf. It was yellow and bright like a blond girl's hair. Gus, the captain, sat on the rail and gloomily watched it flake from the coil. He was of a vastness shrunken by age. His face under his white hair was creased and seamed like tanned shark leather. He squinted through heavy lids as if the glare of sun on water had driven his eyes back into his head.

He leaned and closed his fingers gently about the flowing hawser. It rasped comfortingly over his hard palms. Its smell, oakum and new hemp, came up to him faintly. He sniffed as if it was a good smell. He picked up an end of chain beside him on the deck. He fitted the hawser over a thimble at its end. His thumbs bored into the hemp. The strands slid through the openings. The fibers creaked as he pulled them tight.



He rolled the splice between his palms and looked at it. Some wild night outside they would all swing on it. It would not fail. They could all brace themselves in their bunks and go to sleep. That is, all save Gus, the captain. He would not be out there any more in the hard weather. He was too old. Today the doctor had told him that he was no longer fit to command. He must rest ashore.

The two seamen came for orders. He waved his arm at the hawser.

"Every kink must be out and a harbor coil on the foredeck. That will be all. We are ready for sea. You know when we sail?"

"With the tide in the morning, Captain Gus."

"That is right. Remember as well when you are drunk tonight. Every one knows. All the divers. All the seamen. If you are not here, I will sail without you and skin you alive when I come in again."

He walked wearily across the road to Louis's place, a coffee shop. The narrow room with its white-topped tables, its long dusty bar, was empty. He ordered a *narghile*—a water pipe—from the waiter, and *masticha*. The pipe made a melancholy gurgling sound like a woman's snore as he drew on its long stem. Occasionally he sipped the *masticha*. The anchorage spread before him, dancing in the afternoon breeze. A pelican splashed after a fish. The drops of water shone in the sun. He stared unseeing through his squinting lids.

Louis, the proprietor, came from the kitchen. He was a Spartan with big brown eyes. His large kidskin slippers squashed softly as he walked.

"Well, my friend," he said, "what news?"

The old man shook his head.

"For me," he said, "it is bad."

"The doctor tells you something, eh?"

He waited for Gus to speak. The old man stared unhappily over the water.

"Only that I am old," he finally said.

"Ah." Louis nodded. "Surely that is no sin. But wait—I will get some *masticha*. We will talk."

His slippers made their squishing sound. He placed a decanter on the table.

"You are ready for sea?" he asked. "Good! Then we will drink. That is your *masticha*. I give it to you for good voyage. Now tell me."

THE old man filled his glass.

"That *scyllus*—that shark—that I owe the money to, he did all the talking. The doctor lashed a bag about my arm and blew it up until it was tight. He held little letters in front of me that I could not see. He did many things. At last he shook his head. That *scyllus* said, 'Doctor, would you say this man is still able to command?' "

He looked away as if the doctor's answer was too unjust to repeat. He slowly swung back his head and drained his glass.

" 'No,' the doctor said, 'this man should stay ashore and take things easy.'

" 'If I stay ashore I can not take things easy,' I said. 'All my life I have been at sea. Why do you say I can not be a good captain? You do not need to read little letters on the sponge banks. You need hands more than eyes.' I took a ten-cent piece and bent it like this—" he fished in his pocket and squeezed a coin between his thumb and fingers and tossed it, creased, on the table.

" 'That makes no difference,' the doctor said. 'Your rigging is all right, but your hull is bad. If you were in the Navy you would have been ashore ten years ago. Do you think you are Ulysses, that you can sail forever?' "

He stopped. Louis filled his glass. The old man squinted out over the anchorage.

"And so?" Louis asked.

"We came outside. That damn shark said, 'That is all I wanted to know.

You are through!'

"'How can I be through?' I said to him. 'I have no money.'

"'You have a daughter, Elpineke,' he said, and grinned like a goat. 'She still owns a share in the *Athene*. I own the rest now. She marries Andrew, your best diver, soon, I have heard. We will make him captain. You can live with them.'

"'That I can not do,' I told him, 'because I love them both. I can not live with them like a beggar or they would soon cease to love me.'

"'If you can not live with people because you love them,' he said like an impudent dog, 'I do not know what you can do, but you are going to stay ashore.'

"'Not this trip,' I told him. 'After that, yes, but I shall go this time or you will have no crew. We are all provisioned and ready. You will lose two weeks if I say the word now. The weather will be fair. Your boat will be—'" he sniffed at the irony of the word—"'safe—with me. Andrew will make you—'" he paused, and then decided to say it—"'a good captain. I will tell him my last tricks this time.'"

Gus laughed and went on:

"'All right,' he said, and we shook hands. 'It is only just.' He was fair, maybe a little kind, but I feel bad."

He drained his glass and sat moodily looking at the center of the table. Louis stroked his chin and looked at him with sympathy.

"Andrew will be captain," he said softly as if in wonder. "What you think?"

"Louis, my friend, I do not know. I do not know. The *Athene!* My daughter! If something should happen—" he shook his head—"and I could do nothing to help." He beat on the table in angry helplessness. "You see, I could do nothing!"

"Pooh," Louis scoffed. "Andrew will be all right. But your last trip, Gus? That is hard to believe." He brightened. "You have scratched much bottom. It is time." He filled the two glasses, the old man's and his own. "You should stay ashore and rest."

"Rest?" The old man spat. "I, Gus, must find a warm place in the sun like *buffo*, the crawfish, and rest? I can not rest. I can not rest from voyaging. All my life I have been at sea. Over deep water is where I find my fun. We come in. I can not wait until we cast the bowline on the dock again and find the swell outside. Come, Louis, my friend, drink with me, or I go mad thinking about it."

He gulped the fiery white liquor and filled his glass again.

"One life sometimes seems not enough," he said.

"We Greeks are lovers of life," Louis mused.

"But of life. To breathe is not to live. I, Gus, must sit like an old woman and wait. How can I sit still and wait?" He sat up stiffly, his eyes gleaming behind their wrinkled, pursed lids. "I, a diver, who has fought with octopus?"

He leaped to his feet and clenched his gnarled fists, then resumed his soliloquy.

"One day off Cedar Keys I was in a cave in ten-fathom water. I looked for the white sponge that grows in such places. A jewfish as big as this room lived there. He came home. He made that cave black, like night. For three hours I waited for him to go."

He waved his arms.

"I am a captain. I have fought with storms. I have fought with Old Whee-e-e-e, the hurricane. The one we have waited for now. He is the champion. I—" he slapped his chest— "have heard his terrible high howl. How can I—" it was almost a cry— "be a beggar, sitting still and waiting?"

Louis snorted.

"You are *buffo* the fool, not *buffo* the crawfish. You have fought with all of Poseidon's devils and you fear something that is in your mind. Drink! Get drunk! Tomorrow you sail with the tide. After that, who knows?"

THERE was no breeze save the dead flow of air over the *Athene* as she moved slowly over the flat Gulf. Her wake reached straight astern. Moonlight made it churning silver. The regular pulsations of the motor shook her gently, like a strong laboring heart. Her bow wave curved and died in a gentle hiss.

"Andrew!" Gus called softly.

The diver rose from the deck and was beside him. His eyes flashed in the light of the binnacle.

"Steer awhile, Andrew. There is no breeze for my cheek to feel. My eyes are weary of the compass. It is west-northwest."

"A star, Gus. I find a star and rest upon it." The diver took the big wooden tiller.

"For me they flicker and go out." The old man rubbed his eyes and studied the waning moon. "For Turkey the young moon. For the Japanese the rising sun. For spongers on the Gulf it should be that." He nodded into the sky. "The blue bars of Greece and the ragged old moon of October. It shuts the door on Old Whee-e-e-e. It tells us the road is clear again."

"For all the fishermen," the diver said, "it is a friendly moon. The red snapper men of Cuba, the turtle fishermen, the big liners, too. Even the birds and fish. The hurricane is no one's friend. You have always feared him, Gus?"

"One who says otherwise lies. But I do not tremble every time I hear his name. There is something grand about him. He is the king."

The diver shuddered.

"He is devil to me. He makes many widows, Gus."

"If one thinks of that, he is always in fear. And you will soon have it to think about too." He chuckled low. "I shall give you my rule. Never think about a wife until you throw the bowline on the dock. Then you say to yourself, 'That's right, I do have a wife. She lives here. I shall go now and see her. I hope she is well.' "

"I could not do that to Elpineke."

The smile died on the old man's face. He sat nodding in silence. The low gleam of light accented the highlight and shadow of his head. It seemed a rough casting in bronze.

"I could not do it now," he said finally. "I was young then. Maybe I have belonged to the sea too much." He looked at the moon. "Three hours until dawn," he said. "You will steer?"

The diver nodded.

"You say 'Gus' once—I will come."

He picked his way softly forward. Tucked in sheltered places about the deck his divers and seamen sprawled asleep. He stopped and peered at them. Andrew could hear him muttering kindly. He mounted the steep sheer of the bow deck and sank wearily on the diver's seat. One arm embraced the tall stempiece. Before him spread the dark, calm waters. The steady thrust of air flowed, liquid and cool, over his face. The smell of a thousand miles of tropic sea, unforgetable, unforgotten, that was the very essence of all that was strange and fascinating, that was the odor of romance to him still, enveloped him.

At dawn they began the search for sponge bottom. Gus, the tiller between his legs, stood and studied the water.

"The leads," he commanded.

A seaman at each rail heaved the tapering weights. They leaped in a low arc forward and splashed off the bows. The lines ran out. The seamen measured. They stretched as far as their arms could reach as they hauled in—each full length a fathom.

"Eighteen," one cried, "but sand."

Slowly cruising, they groped for the bar. Suddenly in midafternoon it was there. Mashed white rock and coral specked the lead.

"*Bar-r-r-r-r-a!*" the leadsman cried.

Andrew came up from the cabin. The divers had drawn apart. Before they had been like the seamen, happy and laughing. Now they retired to the dim cabin. They sat staring into space or

idly reading the twice-read Greek newspapers from New York. It was a dangerous business, going suddenly into a hundred feet of water and breathing air of sixty pounds' pressure.

Andrew struggled into the heavy suit and sat on the sponge hatch while the bronze shoulder piece was thumb-screwed into place. Gus started the air motor. He smiled at the young diver.

"Gus," Andrew called, "for your last cruise we will give you fat sponge. I will find them all as big as King Constantine's crown."

The crew grinned. Gus waved his hand. The helmet descended over the diver's head. He plunged over the side. A boiling of minute bubbles that turned the water light blue soared to the surface and marked his trail. The *Athene* followed him. Gus swung the tiller. The two motors droned. The sun burned away the afternoon. The divers splashed, one after the other, over the side, spent their thirty minutes on the bottom and came dripping in over the rail. The mound of black-skinned sponges mounted.

THE *Athene* moored for the night. The acrid smell of burning charcoal from the galley stove blended with the pungency of meat stewing in garlic and thyme. The divers laughed again, the day's work ended. The old man and Andrew stood together on the deck.

"Far off," the diver said, "I see clouds like feathers."

The old man turned his face aloft.

"Like feathers?"

They were the faintest of traceries. They were no more than filaments, but each one definite and graceful. They arched against the dome of the sky, leading back to a focus as if they were bound together to make a fan.

"They are white?"

"The color of opals. They point that way—toward Cuba—the Yucatan," the diver said.

"You have young eyes. The Yucatan!" The old man lowered his head. "They mean nothing. They must mean nothing. The glass is where it should be. All signs are for good weather. You felt nothing on the bottom?"

"It was clear. There were no currents but the tide."

"Old Whee-e-e-e is gone. Sometimes those feathers are in his crown. But not now."

They ate and slept. At sunrise the cook started his fire and made the pot of Turkish coffee that is the divers' only food until night. The seamen breakfasted on white cheese and bread. They held the round loaves against their bellies and pulled the knife toward them as they sliced off big slabs.

"The clouds like feathers," Gus said softly in Andrew's ear, "they are still there?"

"The sun makes them pink. Beneath is a low bank of cloud."

"The glass is down a little, but not much. They point the same way?"

"They have not changed."

The old man shook his head.

"So! What do you say?" he asked, and waited.

The diver gazed into the west.

"We have come a long way," he finally said. "We need sponge. I do not want to be frightened away by little clouds."

"Ho!" the old man chortled. "That is the way to feel. We will watch. You tell me of the bottom."

A thin pallium of cloud, at first no heavier than haze, moved in from the westward. The sun shone through it bravely. The *Athene* fished on in the sparkling October weather. The low-hung bank of cloud did not change. A long westerly swell, not caused by any wind they could feel, mysteriously began.

They worked out their bar and sought another. It was late afternoon before they found it. Andrew went down to see. He swung his iron-soled shoes over the side and twisted in midair. He was facing forward when he splashed. The

weight of the suit carried him down ten feet. He bobbed up again. He pushed his head against the air valve inside the helmet. The air hissed free. Slowly he slid under. His feet hung straight. His arms were bent, the closed fists in front of his chest. His eyes were all of him that moved. They swung about, watching from the helmet's miniature windows.

He passed ten fathoms. Suddenly the green luminous light was gone. He was in gray twilight.

"*Thola! Thola!*" he cried. "The mud! The mud!"

His feet grated on the bottom. He was in Stygian darkness. The ancient ooze of the ocean's floor had been swept from its bed. It floated suspended in fifty feet of water, a dense, horrible cloud. There was no light at all. It was worse than night. About his body nervous, eddying currents tugged and pushed like hands he could not see. Far off, he could hear the sound of the air motor coming faintly down the hose, like a clucking tongue. He jerked the lifeline. The answering heave lifted him. He soared to the surface. Gus could read the terror in his eyes as he broke water.

It signified one thing—a storm. Those clouds like feathers had meant something. Off in the Yucatan it was roaring. It had set the deep currents violently in action over thousands of miles of bottom. Those nervous currents told the truth. The old man looked at the sky. The pallium had thickened. He squinted, his hands shading his eyes. The low-hung sun wore a ring, an ugly brown aura like smoke, that even he could see. He felt a quick surge of exultation. Something with meat on its bones was coming. A slow smile spread over his face. Andrew was beside him.

"The bottom is mad, Gus!" he gasped. "We must go."

The old man still smiled aloft.

"Something comes to kiss old Gus goodby, eh?" He gripped the diver's arm. "Yes, we go. Now." He yelled at the crew. "The diving gear, the propeller guards—everything stowed for storm. We go for the shallow water behind Pepperfish Key."

He climbed in the steering well. The *Athene* made a long sweep about. She straightened on the course; due east, sixty miles to the beach. Over her the sky brooded. She moved slowly, ascending and dipping, over the long pewter swell; a tiny rotund hull that left a fleck of foam astern that soon was gone. The sun went down. The west was angry in venomous red as if some land—as if China thousands of miles away were afire and all the dragons were dying. Faintly, like a breath, the first of the wind touched the old man's cheek.

"Sails!" he called.

They set the two pieces; the squat loose-footed mainsail and the tiny mizzen, rigged on a boomkin over the stern. The canvas beat idly for a moment and then slapped full and hard as the first strong gust swept in. Rain was in the wind; warm, scuttling drops that drummed on the sails and the decks. It was out of the east-southeast. A long starboard tack, close-hauled, Gus decided, and then, if they fell short, a short port tack in the shallow water.

The *Athene* would need her sails to help the motor and steady her through the head seas. He would carry them as long as they would stay. He had it all carefully and simply planned. The *Athene's* bow lifted, the wind whined, the rain drifted in leaden sheets. He stood proudly. Whatever it was, he was ready.

Mocking him, his motor chimed out of tune. He stiffened and cocked his head. The exhaust barked, sang smoothly for a moment, then loped unevenly. He freed the *Athene* on the wind to ease her pitching. A seaman slid the engine hatch open. The electric light against the bulkhead shone on the crew's yellow oilskins, glistening in the rain.

"It is a valve," Andrew yelled. He swung below into the engine room. "Come, we will get it. We will put in a new one."

"That is right," Gus said. "Hurry like mad, but do it well."

It was a simple task. They had done it, all of them, before. This time they were afraid. The vessel seemed cold and dead without the steady pulse of her machinery. Sounds that should have been drowned were all about them; the slushing of gasoline in the tanks, the gurgling of water in the bilge, the drumming of rain on the decks. Minutes useful for flight were going. Whatever they were fleeing was closing in.

Gus could see their heads, unkempt, tousled, moving back and forth across the hatchway. A wave top crashed on the bow deck. It cascaded down the waterways. A seaman, a boy, turned and looked into the darkness. His lips quivered in fright.

"Ah, Tony," the old man said above him, "don't cry. There is nothing to fear. Come, you shall steer for me. Here—the wind here—" he slapped the boy's face gently on the cheekbone. "Just keep her good and full. I go for a minute."

HE FELT in his blankets for a light and flashed it on the barometer hanging over his pillow. He leaned across the bunk and peered, the sou'wester pushed back on his white hair. The stubble of beard about his mouth bristled as he whistled silently. The bottom, suddenly, terrifyingly, was falling out of the world.

"Christos!" he muttered.

He snapped off the light and turned to go. His hand on the ladder, he paused. Could it be? It was late. Too late! The moon would not be wrong. Yet those clouds like feathers? That long swell from the west? This glass that was chasing its tail? Born in the Yucatan! Those lonely waters where there would be no early reports, no warning from the Coast Guard. Was he caught? Was it Old Whee-e-e-e, running late?

The ladder pulsed gently under his hand. The engine—they had it. He strode up on deck, his wet oilskins swishing against the hatchway. His face swung to feel the wind. It was making rapidly.

"Good boys!" he shouted. "One—you, Tony—for lookout. The rest below. Let Gus have her."

He came up to the course. The clutch slid home. He pulled the throttle cord. The *Athene* settled her stern and started away. She slammed into the first sea. It exploded with a burst of white water about her bows. She staggered, gathered way and climbed slowly up the next crest. Her stern soared as the sea swept under her. The old man stood as straight and tall in his well as if in a high pulpit. The glow from the binnacle outlined him against the black sky. From the westward came a roll of thunder—a low, rumbling growl. He turned his head and listened.

"You! It *is* you! You waited for me?" He threw back his head and bared his teeth. "All right. We will dance together, you and I."

The stern dropped with him into the trough. He leaned forward and gaged the oncoming sea.

"*Athene,* my tough little one," he pleaded, "we go for the land. There you can preen and sleep. Now we fight. What do you say?"

The *Athene* shouldered bravely up the crest.

"Ho-ho, you see!" he shouted to the west. "You spoiler of little islands, you howler in the night—we are not afraid!"

His race, as he well knew, was with time. The eye of the hurricane was to the westward, probably moving something east of north. He was in the dangerous sector, near the eastern edge. His wind would shift as the storm progressed. He could expect southeast, south and southwest in succession, with increasingly bad sea conditions as the

wind cleared the land and blew over the open reaches of the Gulf.

To live, he had to avoid the worst of those seas. There was one way: to shoal his water as fast as he could. The long, gradual slope of the bottom off the friendly coast would save him if he could get far enough in time. It was so gradual, that slope of bottom, that it wore down the seas without breaking them. It was different from any other coast on the continent. Safety on all the rest was in flight. Here, salvation was to embrace the land.

The hour lost with the motor was dear. The wind and sea grew steadily worse. The *Athene* was a true sponger, lusty as a young bull, but full on the bows, beamy for her length. She pounded with a roar like guns. Her rigging shrieked with strain. The two small patches of canvas were already too much. There was no time, no chance for mercy. The old man drove madly, roaringly, gloriously; a part of the sound and fury.

"Call out your name for me!" he shouted at the sky. "Whee-e-e-e!" he mocked the wind. "Whee-e-e-e! That is good. You sing well. I shall sing for you." He roared out deep, guttural notes. "You do not understand a Turkish song? You do not know Turkey? You want something from the Caribbean? All right—"

The running lights glowed red and green on curtains of spray that leaped from the bows. It whipped across the deck and stung the lookout's coat like shot hitting a bucket. The sound of the wind and its ally, the rain, was a wailing saw that grew ever larger, nearer, until it seemed to be ripping the sky, the sea, the continent, asunder. The lookout, the boy Tony, slid the hatch and sprawled on the cabin floor. Andrew knelt beside him.

"I'm afraid," the boy cried. "Old Gus shouts. He sings." He clutched at the diver. "It is Old Whee-e-e-e, Andrew, and he jokes and curses at the storm. He cares for nothing." He stared wide-eyed in Andrew's face. "All of us, we die."

He swung his eyes about the cabin. It was a sodden mass of blankets, clothes, canned stores, all adrift. The bread locker had burst and spewed soaked, bloated loaves. The divers were wedged in their bunks. Their heads were buried in their arms. The seamen sprawled on the floor. They looked vacantly at the boy as if he were a stranger. Against the forward bulkhead a long sausage swung from a nail. It leaped away from the wall, then thumped back again and swung violently like a crazy pendulum. The boy swayed to his feet and moved toward it. The *Athene* crashed down. He tumbled in a heap. His hands reached out and tore the sausage from the nail. He hurled it down. No one looked up. He buried his head in a wadded blanket, vomiting and weeping.

THE old man turned as Andrew tugged at his arm. He squatted to put his ear close to the diver's mouth.

"How long do we last, Gus?" Andrew screamed.

"Last? We last forever. I guess ten fathom now. Saint Nicholas gives me six fathom. That is enough."

His white hair straggled over his forehead under his sou'wester. His eyes were red from salt. The lines in his face were deep etched and black in the dim light. His smile was like some kindly monster's as he looked at the little diver.

"You think of Elpineke, white and warm in her bed, eh?"

Andrew's face screwed in agony. The old man chuckled.

"Don't worry. She still belongs to you. She prays for you. Old Whee-e-e-e, old Gus—we understand each other." He stood and yelled. "Is that not so, you howling one? You, who want my mainsail. You, who want my mast with which to pick your dirty tusks. I give it to you, but not yet—

you hear me, not yet!"

He leaned and gripped the diver and drew him close to his face.

"I sail as long as I can. The mainsail or the spar will go. You will hear it. Come with every one. You will steer. We anchor." He shoved the diver away, motioning to him to go.

It was the spar that went. The starboard shroud lanyards—they were hemp line threaded through dead-eyes—parted with a dull boom. The yellow pine mast splintered in a jagged fracture three feet above the deck. The *Athene* lurched as the pressure was released. The white-faced crew poured out of the hatch. Gus waited for Andrew to take the tiller. Then he was among them. They cut the jumbled mass of rigging loose and it floated free.

"The big hook now," the old man yelled. "We make it up here, amidships. One hand for the *Athene*, one hand for yourselves. Tony—" he clutched the boy's shoulder—"tear a blanket—this wide—for parceling."

They struggled with the three-hundred-pound anchor. A seaman held a flashlight. It made the spray and driving rain look like fine snow. They seemed like lost men toiling desperately in a blizzard. They fitted the anchor's stock in place and lashed the pin. They screwed the shackle home. They balanced one fluke over the rail and let go. The anchor slid into the back of a sea.

Gus crouched beside the oak bitt in the bows. He snubbed the hawse gently, feeling the big hook take the ground. Quickly he made fast. The *Athene* surged against the hawser. It twanged taut, vibrating until the deck trembled. Gus's roar came faintly. The clutch, free those dangerous moments, clicked into ahead. The motor eased the strain. It was safely done.

"Relieve Andrew," the old man yelled to a seaman. "Tell him to come here."

He held the torn strips of blanket, waiting for the diver.

"You did that well," he said. "Now I give you another hard job. Parcel that hawser as though you were swaddling the baby Christos. And hang on if you want to live. Out there—" he gripped the diver's arm and pointed at the sea—"is the big Fineesh. If you are washed off, Elpineke marries a shopkeeper. Go. I am afraid to go myself."

He looked questioningly into the diver's eyes. Andrew's head jerked back and he stared up into the squinting, challenging face. His hand went out and took the strips of blanket. He crawled forward. The old man waited and then followed him. He hung back, watching the diver, waiting ready to reach out and save him. Slowly, torturously, buried to the waist at times, Andrew wrapped the woolen rags about the hawser to make a parceling. It was a padding, cushioning the hawser where it passed through a chock and went over the bows. It was the point of greatest strain, of greatest chafe.

The crew waited for them, squatting in the lee of the cabin. Finally they appeared. The old man crouched in their midst.

"All right!" he yelled. "Everything is good. A new hawser. Good bottom and—" he swung his grinning face about—"brave boys. Get below. Go to bed."

He cuffed them toward the hatch. As they climbed below he stuck his head and shoulders into the cabin.

"You, Tony, you don't cry, eh? Naw, you are a good seaman now. Tony baptize new boys. Put your light on my barometer. How much?"

"Twenty-eight—a little below. It has stopped there, Gus."

"Pooh, that is nothing."

He found Andrew at the tiller.

"You rest, Gus," the diver said.

"I feel good," the old man yelled. "My friends—" he waved his arm to take in the black, screaming sky, the lashing sea—"say goodby to me. Can I go below and leave them?" He laughed at the diver's puzzled look. "You think I am a crazy old man, eh? Only for my poor boys, I would have a good time.

All right, you steer. We will both stay here."

He stepped into the well beside the diver.

"*Cara mia,* it blows now. It will be like hell here for awhile."

"How much longer?" Andrew screamed in his ear.

"If we can hold until daylight— The center is northwest, going away fast. Old Whee-e-e-e is late. He came fast. That is why he caught us." The wind snatched at his words. "We—outside edge. Tell by the shifts." He looked at the compass. "South-southwest now. Daylight—southwest."

He pulled his sou'wester low over his eyes. He peered under its brim, trying to see forward. It was no good. He could not see farther than the cabin trunk. The air was filled with driving water. The tops were blowing off the seas now.

Whee-e — whee-e-e! Whee-e-e-e — whawha! Whaw! The wind mounted to the last flailing blow. It sliced off the crests and flung them horizontally. The men hid their mouths in the hollow of their shoulders to breathe. The hurtling fragments—they were no longer drops—beat against their necks, their hands, like flying gravel. Then came the momentary lull between the squalls. Gus leaned out to see the surface of the water rushing by close alongside. The night had no light, but the mad sea glowed with unnatural whiteness as if it were boiling milk. The moment seemed full of peace.

Whee-e-e-whee-e-e-whee-e-e-e! The keening blow came again.

IN THE cabin the divers and seamen lay quiet in the bunks, staring at the ceiling with wide eyes, waiting. A hand gripping a bunk rail showed white knuckles. The cords of a forearm embracing a stanchion were taut. The sound, the terror, had a rhythm—the maelstrom of shrieking wind, smashing sea, the little lull; the fury again; the lull. Their minds, their hopes, followed the cadence. It wore them down until all they had left were little hopes like white poker chips. The last one was gone on the slogging blow that was rushing away astern. A new one was waiting for this —this that was coming. They sucked in their breath—now.

The *Athene's* ten tons flung up, up, up. She poised, her nose over the brink, racing her screw. Then she slid madly into the trough. Andrew hugged the tiller against his side with his left arm. His right hand held the throttle cord. The *Athene* told his senses in the blackness when she needed help. The motor speeded, bracing the hull for the blow that hovered just off the bows. It slowed when the danger was past.

Gus watched the diver from the corner of his eyes. Andrew stared straight forward, intent, keen, able. A wave of affection, of gratification, swept over the old man. His big hand reached for and took the tiller.

"Good boy," he said. "Elpineke was right. You will make a good captain. You are not afraid. You make me feel good. Go now and tell all my boys Old Whee-e-e-e will thunder soon. Then the storm will break. He says goodby that way. Ask Saint Nicholas for daylight soon." He urged the diver away.

He settled in the well and passed a turn of line about his waist and made it fast to the deck. He closed his eyes. His mind slid down the anchor hawse to the splice he had made three days—a thousand years—ago. It was in a mad place now, that splice was. It was working for him. For all of them. He had thought that day it would see some wild night. But he feared then that he would not be there. That afternoon he had gotten drunk. He had told that *scyllus* —that blood-sucker he owed money to— that the *Athene* would be safe with him, that the weather would be calm. Calm! His shoulders shook as he chuckled.

"You laugh, too, eh?" he asked the storm. "You tell him on shore tonight, 'Old Whee-e-e-e made different plans.'"

That was a sea. It hit the air-pump house and splashed as high as the mast. But there was no mast. There was no air-pump house, either. Here was a piece of it beside him in the scuppers. He cast off the lashing and stood. The deck forward looked naked, but he could not tell for sure. The galley was probably gone, too—the big box full of charcoal. He could not see the stove. He dropped down again and bent the lashing. The hawser was still there. Saint Nicholas protect it! His engine was still good.

And so was he. Too old, eh? He would like to have that *scyllus* here beside him. That doctor. They would say, "You save my life, I will give you a thousand dollars." And he would say, "Pooh, I will save them both for nothing. Maybe it is worth nothing." His shoulders shook again. He felt good. He was not too old. He was strong.

"As strong as you!" he shouted aloft. "You say, 'Fight, Gus!'" His voice roared. "And do I fight? Eh? Do you say I am too old? Hah!"

He was a little tired, but not too tired to finish. It was not going to last much longer. Already it was moderating a little. By noon they would up anchor and get behind the Pepperfish. By night they would start for home. They would come bravely up the Anclote. The splintered stump of the mast, the shattered pumphouse, the naked galley would show what they had been through. He would brag—try to tell damn fools who did not care that he had seen something. He would fail and get drunk and try again. And then—nothing.

Home! To hell with home. Outside was the best. Andrew had looked at him as if he were crazy when he said his friends, the sea and the hurricane, said goodby to him. But it was true. They were his friends. The only ones he had.

"Yes, you," he growled at the sky. "Even you."

They would go home. His daughter would grow to hate him and wonder why he did not die. He would hate everybody. He would hate life. He would be in hell. He closed his eyes and shook his head. It would not be so bitter as that, he tried to believe. He would see the fleet come into harbor. They would call to him and toss the bowline. They would show him how things had been. He could see the boats, see the wind on water. He could watch a mare's tail—a thunderhead in the sky. Andrew would bring the *Athene* back for him to see again. He had found that out tonight. That worry was gone. The *Athene* and his daughter Elpineke were in good hands. That was something.

"The glass has changed, Gus." It was Andrew's voice. "It goes up fast."

The old man started suddenly as if awakened. He turned up his face.

"The wind lays a little, too. Old Whee-e-e-e will thunder soon."

"I steer now?" Andrew asked.

"You sleep. Tell every one to sleep. It has been bad in the cabin. You can steer us in. When you hear the thunder, you come."

Andrew stared astern.

"Look, Gus, at the sky."

The old man turned about wearily, There was a lightening in the sky, a foul greenish gray.

"It comes at last," he said. "Go, son, and get some rest. We are closer to the end than I thought."

SLOWLY the unearthly light spread over the low-flying clouds; over the raging, leaping seas. Darkness had hidden their awfulness. The *Athene* was lucky, the old man realized, to have lived through the night. Shoaling their water had saved them. Outside, in twenty fathoms, they would have been dead men—broached; tumbled keel over deck; lost forever. But here they were safe. Careful, very careful, a little longer, and then the sun would be shining, the seas blue again, the wind gentle.

He cast off the lashing and stood. His foredeck was swept clean. Even the

stove was gone. The rail had been smashed on the starboard bow. He strained forward, trying to see the hawser. He could make out its turns about the bitt, see its taut yellow line stretching forward to the chock. The parceling of blanket strips seemed ragged. He could see some of it hanging loose inside the rail. That must be repaired at once. It had done well to last as long as it had. He settled in the well to think how he could do it. He must do it himself this time. He would not send Andrew up there again. It would not be fair. He could trust no one else.

Something snapped inside his head. It hurt him. He blinked. Suddenly there was no more light. The dawn, then, had not come. He had been dreaming. He looked at his hand. He could not see it. He could not see. There seemed to be light. He reached out and felt for the binnacle. It was there. His hand felt the hot brass about the lamp. The lamp was burning. The lamp was burning, and he could not see it. He was blind. Mary, Mary, he was blind! He was—

The cry died in his throat. He would scare his boys to death. Not now. They were almost through. He floundered about in the well, patting with his hands. The tiller slammed against his side. He sat up straight and tucked it under his arm. He did not move. He did not squint any more. His lids were opened wide. His eyes did not move.

His right hand slowly sought beside him. He found the lashing he had cast from his wrist. He passed it twice about the tiller and drew it tight. He made the loose end fast. Slowly he crept out of the well and along the deck. His hand touched the cabin trunk in front of him. He slid back the hatch and groped inside.

"Gus," the boy Tony said softly beneath him, "what you want?"

"Sh-h-h," he said. "They sleep?"

"I call Andrew when it thunders. You want your shore pants?"

The old man had already found them hanging from his hook against the bulkhead. He felt in a pocket and held out his watch.

"Tony," he said, "you keep this for me."

The boy's fingers brushed warm against his hand. He closed the hatch slowly and crawled forward. The blue trousers trailed from his teeth. When the *Athene* plunged he froze flat in the scuppers. His reaching fingers touched the big oak bitt. He slid up beside it. The hawser was hard and strong under his hand. He pulled the tatters of blanket free. The bow hung. He could sense the abyss beneath. He gripped the hawser and held his breath.

The solid water sucked at his body, trying to tear him away. He sputtered and came up on one knee. Quickly he passed the blue trousers about the hawser. The bow poised again; the hawser slackened. He jammed the wadded cloth into the chock and dropped flat. It was done. The bow's impact with the wave was a dull stunning thud. The warm water roared about him and drained away. He lay still.

Far off to the northward the thunder growled. Low at first, it rumbled nearer. Overhead in the zenith it paused and then, with one ringing detonation, filled the sky.

The old man swayed to his feet. His sightless face turned aloft.

"You go, Old Whee-e-e-e," he called. "You leave me?"

A gray wave reached long foaming claws in over the bow. It gathered him into its hoary embrace. Swiftly they swept off to leeward together. His sou'wester floated free. It spun idly for a moment. Then even that was gone.

The BARNSTORMER

By the Author of "The Balloonatic"

LELAND S. JAMIESON

THE calliope was playing the Blue Danube with steam-lunged repetition. Georgia farmers and their wives and children were gyrating in mob formation and enjoying themselves hugely—but not in Paul Dodd's balloon. There were plenty of people at the Community Fair where Dodd was barnstorming, offering to haul two passengers for five dollars, but with no customers. An airplane had worked the town two weeks before, and a free balloon was, although a curiosity, not the attraction it normally should have been.

It was not till three o'clock of that Thursday afternoon that Dodd made his first ascension of the day. And it was while in the air that he first came to the attention of the wild-life photographer.

Dan Haggard, in total disgust, having spent a week without appreciable success trying to photograph denizens of the Okefenokee Swamp, was driving his car along the highway at the moment the balloon soared majestically above the tents of the fairgrounds. Seeing it, he turned around and retraced his path to the intersection. Five minutes later, when Paul Dodd was once more on the ground, Haggard said to him:

"See here—I'm in a devil of a predicament. I have a contract for pictures of a lot of birds and things from back there in that swamp, but I couldn't get them with a dugout canoe. Your balloon is just the thing. We can drift along on the wind, very low, without any noise, and I can use a long-range lens and get just what I want. How about it? Two hundred dollars if I get what I need; one hundred if I don't."

Paul Dodd was a stocky young man, with a quiet but self-confident air. He'd been an aeronaut almost ever since he could remember. A barnstormer, his balloon was all he had with which to make

a living; flying it was all he knew. Two hundred dollars was a lot of money that Fall, but it wouldn't buy a new balloon. He'd heard too much of the dangers of the Okefenokee, and he was not enthusiastic.

"I don't make much where I am, ride-hopping being what it is," he said. "But at least I'm not in danger of losing my balloon. Sorry, buddy; I'm not interested."

Haggard was tall, long-muscled, with hawk-like features and an imperturbable persistence.

"Two hundred bucks — hell, man, that's more than you'll make down here all week! There'll be no danger to the balloon. We just take off at one end of the swamp when the wind is right and drift the length of it and come out at the other. What's to happen to damage the balloon?"

"Sudden storm, maybe. This country down here's full of 'em; that swamp's the worst place in the world."

"Storm?" Haggard scoffed. The sky was clear, the sun bright and keen. "Storm today?"

"The wind's not right today," Paul Dodd pointed out. "You better figure out some other way."

"What's the balloon worth?" Haggard persisted. "Looks pretty old to me."

Dodd was annoyed at the stranger's attempt to belittle the balloon he wanted to hire. He said:

"Sure, it's old. But it flies. I can't afford to lose it."

Haggard unpocketed his wallet.

"Well, I've *got* to have those pictures. I'll pay for the balloon if something happens. Three hundred bucks to take me through—in cash, right now. What about it?"

So in the end Paul Dodd succumbed; and the next day he was setting up his coal gas generating plant in a clearing in the pines near Callahan. An hour before noon they got away, climbed to fifty feet above the trees and slid with the wind toward the great open swamp, to fly all afternoon.

THEY came to the swamp at last, and Dodd watched Haggard with the camera. He would see an egret standing in the water yards ahead and would whisper quick instructions; Dodd would valve a little and the balloon would slip down in a clearing, over open water, and approach the bird through soundless space. Haggard's camera, at the proper instant, would click softly and he would say:

"Perfect! Swell shot! This is the way to get pictures in this swamp—they don't see you coming and don't hear you."

Paul would nod, drop a handful of fine sand and climb above the gnarled and broken fringe of cypress stumps so the basket would pass easily.

It was interesting. Haggard was an artist in his work; and the money was most opportune to Dodd. He became quite glad that he had come, although as yet the menace of the swamp was still a brooding danger over him. If something happened—anything, almost—and they went down, they never would get out. Mosquitos would swarm on them; or a moccasin would do a quick and fatal job.

Jacksonville had long since dropped below the flat horizon and merged with the dun-green of the pines. Folkston was a lump on the skyline miles away, with the sun a pinpoint of sharp light on its aluminum-painted water tank. Waycross was beyond the curve of earth far to the north. The swamp, it seemed, was almost endless all about them—a tangled trap. Below the balloon lay a mat of fallen logs, half rotted in the water, half submerged. To one side was a hummock, a tangle of thick vegetation, green and lush and as permanent and unending as the swamp itself. They paralleled a lane of deep black water, and as Dodd watched he saw an alligator swimming there in sluggish ease, its eyes, bulbous just above the surface, making gentle ripples on the mirrored surface.

"Got that baby," Haggard exulted, as

the 'gator raised its head and broke the water. Then he added in a quick, imperative whisper, "Down—down! See that bear there on the island?"

Paul Dodd did not see the bear; he was thinking of that 'gator and what chance a man would have against it, swimming or wading. He valved automatically, but the balloon did not descend quite quickly enough for the photographer to get within easy range. Haggard, in a quick show of ill temper, muttered:

"Don't be so slow! When I say up, or down, you make this outfit move!"

"This isn't an airplane," Dodd pointed out. "I need some time. If I valve too much I'll put us in the swamp. I'll be glad when this is over. This place gives me the creeps."

Haggard whistled suddenly, very softly, through his teeth.

"Black panther!" he muttered in his reedy voice. "Up a bit—up! Quick, now! Clear that stub of tree, so I can shoot straight down at him! Man, oh, man, but this will be the prize!"

A black panther was something Paul Dodd had often heard about, but never before seen. He looked, and failed to see the animal. He reached for a scoopful of white sand to dump.

"I can't see him. You find more things down there—"

"I didn't hire you to look," Haggard snapped in sudden anger. "Climb! I hired you to put me where I could take pictures from the air."

He muttered in his thin voice something which Dodd could not fully understand, and, with camera in hand, scrambled up upon that basket rim to aim his instrument. But this position was not high enough; the panther was behind a clump of brush upon the island. So Haggard, monkey-like, went up into the rigging of the drifting free balloon and stood erect upon the load ring.

He missed his shot. The panther had heard his voice and disappeared instantly into the underbrush. Haggard, who gladly would have paid one hundred dollars for that shot had it turned out the way he wanted it, showered Dodd with angry words.

"Will you keep your mouth shut?" he demanded. "I hired you to bring me across here in a balloon so there wouldn't be any noise—so I could fly slow and low enough to get this wild life in its native haunt. But you keep talking all the time!"

Dodd looked up at the photographer.

"I didn't scare it," he said evenly. "I was whispering. You forgot yourself in your excitement. Don't start riding me. I can fly a rubber cow, but it takes time to climb or descend. You remember that!"

Haggard grumbled. Dodd returned his gaze to the expanse of swamp and watched a heron take off with long thrusts of its jerking legs and climb aloft. Haggard, thoroughly angry, fastened his camera to the sling around his shoulders, eased himself carelessly from the load ring and started down.

Dodd was not watching him, and Haggard was so beside himself with disappointment at the loss of this rare opportunity that he did not observe just what was happening. Earlier, because he had found it in his way, he had insisted that Dodd tie up the balloon rip panel cord so that it would not swing against his head. It was fastened now to the load ring, so that it looped down and then extended up into the envelop. Haggard, in coming down, unwittingly straddled it. He slid down the suspension lines fast—and sat hard on the rip panel loop and jerked it down.

There was a sharp sound like that of a strip of tarred roofing being ripped up with a quick jerk.

As Dodd looked up, he blanched with sudden fear. Above him, in the crown of the balloon, plainly could be heard the whisper of escaping gas. Feverishly he reached to lift Haggard's weight from the loop of the rip panel.

But it was too late. The panel was almost completely out, having opened a long rent in the top of the balloon. The gas went out of the envelop within

a few seconds.

They descended from forty feet. The basket splashed down into black water, sank almost to the rim. The balloon billowed and slowly collapsed, leaning with the gentle wind until it lay, lumpy and folding, upon the green brush of a low hummock. It writhed grotesquely as its life, the escaping gas, went out of it.

Dodd stood in water over his knees. He could not for an instant realize that this catastrophe had really happened. There were twenty miles of trackless swamp on every side. Realization, and an aching fear, shot through him like a bolt.

Haggard, his camera safe, stood on the basket rim and shouted imprecations.

"My plates!" he cried. "Pick 'em up —don't let 'em lie there in the water. For—"

Grim anger displaced fear in Dodd. He turned to Haggard, his eyes deeply blue and dangerous.

"You clumsy fool! Shut up before I dunk you!" He plunged his hands into the water in the basket. Instead of photographic plates, he brought up a lunch box and a thermos bottle. "This time tomorrow, if a moccasin hasn't fixed you, you'll not be worrying about plates. You'll be worrying about something for your belly."

Incredulity had been Haggard's first expression. Then anger and frustration. But within the short space of a minute terror turned his hawk-like features almost green.

"It wasn't my fault," he whined. "I can't help it if you put that damn cord where I'd sit down on it. If you'd climbed fast enough I could have shot the picture from the basket. The fault isn't mine, and I don't intend to stand the loss of your balloon—"

Dodd reached up with a surprisingly strong arm and pulled the other down into the water in front of him.

"You don't intend to pay for it?" he asked, his voice grating. "You ripped it with your clumsiness, and you don't intend to make it up? Buddy, you better get some new intentions quick! Quick, I said! What is it you intend to do?"

"You can't scare me," Haggard said. "You can't make me—"

"I can take the lunch and water and let you get out as you can," Dodd reminded dangerously. "They're part of the equipment of the balloon—my equipment. I'd like to see you walk out of here if I went off and left you flat!"

"We can't walk out—either one of us," Haggard protested wildly. "We've got to fly out or we won't get out. I know! I've been in here before, with guides who know every square foot of the swamp, and I've seen them get lost and not know where they were. We'll both die, I tell you—die! You've got to fix that balloon so we can fly!"

Dodd had been thinking of this himself a moment earlier. There were stories extant of men who had gone into this vast swamp and become lost—hunters or fishermen, even an airplane pilot—whose skeletons still lay somewhere among the rotting, sunken cypress logs. But flying the balloon was out of the question. It was useless, for they had lost its lifting gas and had no means of generating more. Dodd thought of trying to fill the bag with hot air from a fire, but he saw nothing to burn. The brush was green; the fallen logs completely water-soaked. They would have to wade out, if they got out. And Dodd knew that this way their chances were extremely slim.

But this balloon was all he had, and a replacement would cost money.

"I'll sell you the balloon as is for a thousand bucks," he said, "and throw in a half interest in the lunch, water and compass. Take it or leave it. But make up your mind. Pile your camera and plates under your jacket on the hummock, so you can find them if we live to come back here to try to salvage the balloon. I can hold out three days with the food we have. I know, because I've

gone that long before. After that, God only knows. But come on!"

"O.K," said Haggard soberly. "I don't have the cash. I'll pay you when we get to civilization."

"You'll write out an I.O.U. right now," said Dodd.

They would need their matches, he considered, for a smudge against mosquitos when they ran out of oil. So, with cement from the balloon repair kit and a piece of balloon cloth, he made a water-tight packet and put the matches in his pocket. Then, while Haggard was arranging his camera and plates, Dodd removed the compass and the maps from the balloon. With his pencil he drew a line from where he thought they were to the eastern edge of the swamp. As nearly as he could estimate by eyesight, the course outside was eighty-five degrees, and the distance almost twenty miles.

THE precariousness of their position was entirely clear. They were about to set out on a footrace against time and physical exhaustion. By walking six miles a day for three days they would get out. But if they couldn't hold that pace, and couldn't last another day—Dodd shuddered, cursed himself and Haggard and the swamp and the balloon.

"Let's go!" he snapped to his companion. "We're not helping matters by standing here."

They stepped cautiously down into the black, dank water, walking eastward from the hummock. Dodd's skin seemed to crawl across his flesh at the thought of moccasins. He led the way, stumbling upon the tangled, rotting logs that lay upon the oozy bottom, and waded to the higher ground of another hummock a hundred feet away.

It was well past noon, and they had not eaten. The season was early Autumn, although in this southern latitude there had as yet been no suggestion of the end of Summer. The sun was hot in its cloudless sky, and gnats and mosquitos, which had not annoyed them in the air, now buzzed and sang around their ears when they passed from the direct glare of the sun into the spots of shade beneath the frequent cypress trees. The gnats made them miserable from the beginning; later on mosquitos would almost drive them mad.

The water was not cold, but it was black and stinking, deep enough in places to reach to Dodd's armpits. Submerged logs were slick and slimly underfoot. They had not gone a hundred yards before Haggard, in the rear, uttered a sharp explosive cry that was muffled as his face slid under water. He came up coughing, cursing, choking.

"Damn the swamp!" he proclaimed bitterly. "Good Lord—think of twenty miles of this!"

Dodd was thinking of it. He was thinking of nightfall, which would come within three hours, bringing a swarm of mosquitos and countless other things to menace them. But he couldn't let himself dwell upon these things.

Haggard said no more, and they waded on, their bodies making rills and eddies in the calm water as they moved. They came to the shallows of an island—or at least it appeared to be an island, broad and flat and covered with saw grass that promised fair footing for a mile beyond. Elation filled Paul Dodd as he left the rooted bottom of the swamp to crawl out upon this strip of land.

But it was not land. It was a floating island, formed of grasses and a kind of shrubbery, the roots of which were so close-packed that small animals might live and move on it at will. It would not support a man; Dodd fell through repeatedly, and, at last, gave up in dark dejection.

They went on, with hard-fought progress. They came to cypress logs piled at crazy angles in the water, and climbed over them and down again and waded on. Paul Dodd saw a bleached log lying just visible upon the water's surface, a

rough-barked fallen timber. He would have stepped upon it, but when it moved, and a 'gator's head reared from the surface of the swamp, open jaws showing the pink of an enormous mouth, he froze in his tracks and in a trance of horror watched the reptile hesitate and then swim sluggishly away.

"Did you see that?" he croaked to Haggard when the danger was long past and they still were standing in water to their knees.

He shivered, licked his lips with a dry tongue, controlled himself and started on.

Haggard shuddered audibly, but did not answer.

They looked back after an hour and could still see the gray-brown of the balloon against the bright green of the hummock where it lay, three-quarters of a mile away. They were amazed and shocked at the slowness of their progress, and advanced with greater effort, but no appreciably greater speed.

Night came upon them suddenly, as night does in that latitude. The sky turned to an ashen hue, then to blood, then to darkness. The stars came out, and mosquitos with them; the swamp became a living hell. Oil of citronella liberally applied did not protect them fully.

The two men crawled up on a low hummock, found a partially clear spot on high ground and prepared to spend the night.

Neither man spoke of the hardships of the day or made allusions to the torture which would come tomorrow. Dodd, his mind still rankling at Haggard's clumsiness which had put them there, did not once mention it. Facts were facts and must be met as such. This was a grim game in which their lives were at stake, and they needed all their strength and ingenuity to win.

They made beds of broken twigs and lay down wearily. Lying in the darkness, after a long period of silence Haggard said:

"What about the food? Better save it, hadn't we? Had breakfast this morning— We can hold out till tomorrow morning, then eat a third of what we have and drink a third of the water. Do that every day."

"Wise," said Dodd, "if we'll stick to that." He lay there slapping viciously at mosquitos. "I think we'll come through."

Just then a sound came through the still night air—a woman's scream. Dodd sat up, his scalp tingling. Haggard got quickly to his feet, a piece of wood held in both hands as a club.

"What was that?" Haggard cried. "Some one live around here, or was that an animal?"

The eery wail came again, dropped to a prolonged, moaning gurgle, then climbed in a wild crescendo to a blood-curdling, high-pitched shriek, and finally died away. A moment later it was answered from another part of the island, and Haggard, trembling in voice and body, said:

"Panther!" His voice was hushed, a bare whisper. "Close! We better be up and on our way!"

But they could not wade at night. There was too much hazard from moccasins and poisonous things that roamed the swamp. Yet Haggard was so terrified that there seemed no holding him. He rose to his feet, but did not move from the hummock.

"Fire," he chattered. "If we could build a fire."

He thrashed about in the darkness and found a few dry sticks. They finally got a fire going sluggishly.

"I'm too upset to sleep," Haggard went on. "We'll stand watches, Dodd. I wish we had a gun! You go to sleep, and I'll call you in three hours."

Dodd was worn out. He lay down again and pulled his clothing about him to protect himself from insects. He was too tired to go immediately to sleep, and he lay there thinking, planning. But at last, some time in the early night, before the moon came up, he did slip into a dreamless, heavy slumber.

HE AWOKE with the sun in his eyes and was instantly conscious of the pains that touched every muscle of his body when he moved. He opened his eyes against the glare, and sat up loggily, muttering to Haggard about the necessity of a quick breakfast and getting under way. Then, in sudden apprehension, he remembered that Haggard should have called him for his watch. The other man was nowhere to be seen.

He shouted, got up and looked around. The lunch was gone. The compass and thermos bottle were not where they had been left the night before. He understood, in a flash of perception, why Haggard had suggested that they save the food and water. Haggard had planned all this—planned to abandon Dodd to certain, agonizing death.

It numbed him to realize the full meaning of his situation. Haggard had condemned him to die within this swamp just as much as if he had put a bullet through Dodd's brain. It was terrifying, but his terror changed slowly to a burning rage. He stood and strained his eyes to the eastward, hoping that Haggard could not have made much progress in the night and still might be visible. He shouted once again.

There was no answer. The swamp held a pervading silence into which his voice penetrated and then echoed back to him. A frog gave forth a solitary croak some yards away and then was still. A bubble of marsh gas erupted from the mirrored surface of the water almost at Dodd's feet; the water rippled in concentric circles for a moment. That was all.

Footprints led down into the oozing mud toward the east and disappeared in the black water. There was no way of knowing how long Haggard had been gone.

Dodd sat down, a sudden weakness overwhelming him. His stomach, his whole mid-section, seemed thin and flimsy, incapable of supporting him. His tongue was dry, already somewhat swollen from the heat. His face was one vast torture where mosquitos had flaunted the odor of citronella oil.

"What a man, to do a trick like that!" Dodd muttered.

A wild desire to overtake Haggard and retaliate inspired new strength. He got up, squared his shoulders and set out in pursuit. Speed was the most important thing, for he would grow weaker with each hour. Haggard, with nourishment, could keep going at a steady pace, but Dodd must make a frantic burst of speed to overtake the other before exhaustion left him weak and crazy, a half dead man soon to die within this reeking swamp.

The day grew hot, and the swamp was filled with dank humidity. Thirst was not so bad as might have been expected, but hunger was an almost overpowering demand. Gnats and mosquitos tortured him; his face gradually grew puffed, and blackened with blood crushed from the attacking insects. But Dodd scarcely felt the stings in later hours. All morning he pushed on, guiding by the sun, forcing himself to an exhausting pace to catch Haggard before it was too late. If he failed to overtake the other man he had no chance at all.

He made good progress throughout the early hours of that day, but as the sun climbed toward its zenith he could not use it accurately as a guide. He had missed Haggard's trail, for it led through water. The fatal danger of becoming lost, of growing befuddled and following an erratic course, was constantly present in his mind to worry him. He proceeded with great caution, sighting upon objects ahead as he could see them, holding a straight line.

Afternoon found him tiring rapidly, yet pushing on with grim determination, more slowly and with greater effort. His clothing was in tatters, his shirt torn from encounters with the brush and jungle of the hummocks he had crossed. Hunger was an awful thing that let weariness reach up from his legs and press his body down into the ooze.

Night found him five miles from where Haggard had deserted him, but all day he had caught no glimpse of the escaping man. In a wave of hopelessness Dodd sat down upon a log at dusk and looked about him with staring eyes from which a trace of fever gleamed.

It was hopeless, and he realized it completely. He was done, and there was no use continuing a useless struggle. His lips were swollen and beginning to crack badly. He debated drinking from the swamp, and hazily recalled stories of dysentery which had killed men for their weakness in succumbing to their thirst. But wasn't he ready to give up? He debated within himself. No, he was not ready; he would not drink now; he would go on as long as possible. When he collapsed—he could drink this filthy water then.

There was no hummock near, and he was too nearly exhausted to wait until the moon came up and he could find one. He slapped mosquitos mechanically when he felt their pain, and his blurred mind conceived a way to get away from them. He made a bed of logs just below the surface, made a pillow from a forked stick, and lay down so that his entire body was submerged and only his head and throat remained above the surface. His tattered shirt made an effective hood. For the first time, mosquitos could not reach him.

Yet even in his blurred thoughts he was afraid, for here he was easy prey for 'gators and moccasins. He lay there in dull, aching apprehension for a time, and then sleep and complete exhaustion overcame his fears.

Morning came before he realized he had been asleep, and he sat up, his hands swollen and wrinkled from their long submersion. Wind struck him in the face, and then a spit of rain. He looked for the sun with eyes slowly closing from the swelling of his face, but there was no sun. A thick gray haze shrouded everything with murky gloom.

But Dodd knew in which direction he had been traveling, and he did not hesitate. He struck out, wading through the ooze and falling over sunken logs, sighting an eagle's nest ahead and guiding on it for his bearing. His body was a racking torture, and weakness was almost overpowering. At times he had to stop and get his breath, sucking deep against the pains and clutchings of his stomach. Then, each time, he went on gamely, slowly, at a steady pace.

THE remainder of this day was a dull, blurred, indefinite existence. Hour after hour Dodd went on. He forgot time and pain and worry. He forgot to be afraid. He moved with a mechanical action that he knew nothing of. Fever mounted in his veins, and he had strange illusions that he was plodding through dust as dry and pulverized as new cement.

Toward afternoon his mind, overtaxed so long, responded to the mercies of amnesia. He forgot who he was, where he was, what it was that he must do. Yet deep-seated somewhere in his brain was the subconscious determination to go on. His memory slipped back through a dozen years, into a dream, into a time when going on was just as important, so it seemed, as going on could ever be. It was as real as the swamp water that lapped around his fraying clothes.

He had been sixteen that day twelve years ago, a boy hobo. He had come into a town in northern Oklahoma, to a park where, in the midst of a carnival, a hot-air balloonist was barking challenges to the crowd to go aloft and make a parachute jump.

"Twenty-five dollars, gold," the balloonist shouted to the crowd, "to the man who will step up and make the flight. . . Danger, ladies and gentlemen? Certainly. But what is danger to the brave?"

Paul Dodd, that day, was hungry. It had been forty-eight hours since he had eaten anything more solid than a stolen watermelon.

"Tell me what I have to do," he said. "I want that twenty-five!"

So they filled the balloon with hot air from a fire built there for that purpose, and Dodd got into the harness. He was trembling, scared as only a boy of that age can be scared.

"Just pull this rope?" he repeated for the third time. "That all I have to do?"

The barker, in a voice for the benefit of all around, replied:

"That's all, son. When you hear the cannon shoot, you pull the rope—and you might pray the parachute comes open, too!"

Before Paul Dodd knew what was happening the balloon was in the air, drifting at high speed with the wind. He listened for the gun, trying to keep from letting panic paralyze his muscles. He waited, but he heard no gun, and then at last he looked down quickly to see what was the matter. The town was far away; the earth three thousand feet below. In desperation he pulled the rope. The universe went crazy, spun around and came back suddenly. The balloon was gone, and a parachute was floating him quite easily to earth. He landed fifteen miles from where the carnival crowd was waiting in the park.

Fifteen miles, on an empty stomach! He walked it in the sun, and collapsed at the balloonist's tent that night at ten o'clock. Beginning the next day, he started a life of barnstorming with balloons. For twelve long years he had lived by his wits. But of all things vivid in his mind, that fifteen-mile tramp was etched most deeply.

Now, as he labored through the swamp, his disordered thoughts had it that he was on that tramp again. He had to go on, to find the man who had the money for him. He was starving, and he had to have the money to buy food. The roving of his mind grew wilder as the day passed by. He stepped upon an alligator lying in the shallow ooze, walked on and never heard the thrashings of the reptile as it came to life. A moccasin swam once within ten feet of him, and he looked at it without a trace of understanding and went on.

NIGHT came again. He slept as he had the night before. Dawn broke, and he struggled up and set out without plan or reason.

It was long past noon when he came, suddenly, to a hummock set in a wide field of stinking water. He saw there a gray-brown mass of color laid up upon the brush, and saw a wicker basket standing almost to its rim in the lagoon. Dully he sank down upon the dry ground and stared foolishly at it through reddened, puffy eyes.

It had rained the day before, and suddenly Dodd realized that the folds of the balloon had collected some rain water and still held it in a pool. He started up, and almost ran; he spilled much of the precious liquid in his efforts. But he drank his fill and sat down, then got up and drank again.

Slowly his mind came back. He realized suddenly that he was back where he and Haggard had set out from three days before. And with that bleak knowledge a final wave of hopelessness swept over him. There was no possible chance of getting out, since he had wandered back here. But he was so tired and weakened by the ravages of hunger that he lay back heavily and thought of death as something almost welcome to end the suffering of his body.

A strong wind blew across the open reaches of the swamp, but in this spot where Dodd lay the brush protected him. Here the mosquitos swarmed to add torment to his final hours. In desperation he got up, waded out to the basket of the balloon and with his pocket knife stripped off enough wicker from the dry rim to build a fire. He would make a smudge, he thought, to protect himself against the swarm—be as comfortable as possible while he waited there to die.

He got the fire going after many ef-

forts, for his matches had become damp even through the rubber covering he had made for them. He lay down so that the smudge drifted lazily over him, and in this position the mosquitos were not quite so bad.

A drugging sleep came over him. He awoke slowly with a burning pain in his feet and looked down. He found the ground on fire over an area ten yards wide. Though in a daze, he realized that the muck forming the island was peat—that it was burning!

His mind, after his astonishment, turned to the possibility of generating hot air for the balloon! He would need a fire which would burn for thirty minutes; in this high wind aloft he would go far in that length of time. He was sure it could be done if he had strength to work out the problem. But he was weak, and the rip panel of the balloon was torn out, and it is no easy task to inflate a balloon for flight with hot air from a fire. There must be a scoop to force the hot air into the envelop, and the envelop must be laid out on the ground in proper form. It is easier to burn the bag than inflate it.

Dodd labored with frenzy, knowing that tomorrow, if he failed today, he would be too weak to do these things. He waded out and found the cement in the basket; after an hour's struggle he had the rip panel once more in place. He tried to haul the basket out of the waist-deep water of the swamp, but was entirely incapable of doing so. The effort prostrated him, and for a precious hour he lay upon the bank, unconscious.

When he was able to sit up, the sun was low, breaking through a long rift in the sullen clouds. The clouds were scudding from the west, their base rough and irregular. Dodd lost hope of getting the balloon into the air before dark came—of ever doing it.

Doggedly he set to work once more, moving with deliberate care. From his parachute he fashioned a scoop to drive the hot air into the appendix of the balloon, and fastened it in place with improvised cord lacing. He cut the basket from the load ring, took one line and tied the load ring to a log with a single bowknot.

It was entirely beyond his strength to lay out the balloon properly for inflation, and he stood wearily considering the alternative of this. The envelop had fallen with the wind and lay in lumps upon the brush of the hummock. At last he decided to inflate it where it was.

He built a platform of wet sticks across the bottom of the load ring—thick so they would not burn through too soon—and transferred burning peat to it and fed the fire. He wrapped the air scoop around the flames, taking care that no lines were burned in two. And slowly the bulbous folds of the balloon assumed a rounding shape and the craft itself took form.

A dull, sustaining excitement swept away some of his fatigue. He fed the fire with great care, and between stokings gathered a supply of peat to take aloft with him.

THE sun was setting as the balloon was filled, and the wind was strong and smooth across the swamp. Mosquitos came out from their hiding places and swarmed as they had done since Dodd had landed in this broad morass. But he did not feel them now. He watched the swelling balloon with eyes from which he could scarcely see, and when it was light and dancing at its stay rope, swaying in the wind, he stepped up upon the load ring, gave the knot a jerk that loosed it, and clung there while the balloon went upward like a shot.

It required constant muscular effort for him to maintain his precarious perch. He had the fire to keep going at a steady rate; and his altitude to control as best he could to stay below the clouds. It was now growing almost dark, that quick dusk of the South. There was the problem of landing, when the fuel was exhausted, and the prob-

lem of staying in the air until the east edge of the swamp was cleared. Of more concern than any of these things was the physical exhaustion, the sudden giddiness, that came to Dodd as a reaction to success.

He was busy with the fire until he reached a thousand feet. In the gathering darkness he could see the lights of Folkston south and east of him. The wind was strong. He added more fuel to the fire, holding to a stay with one hand because of the weakness that assailed him. Hot air cascaded up through the flue formed by the parachute, and the balloon climbed on into the clouds.

The altimeter—all the instruments of flight—were still down there in the basket, and Dodd had no way of knowing how high the balloon ascended. His wristwatch had been soaked with water and had stopped long since, so he could not check the time of take-off or the duration of this flight. But of one thing he was certain: Rather than risk descending in the swamp once more he would keep going as long as his supply of fuel would permit.

There came a time when he was so weak that he could no longer keep his grip upon the stay. He took the line which had been tied to the log and, there in the darkness, fashioned a sling around his body so that if he slipped and fell the rope would stop the fall. He got this done with tiring effort, then looked back at the fire. He was almost too weary to realize what he saw.

The fire had caught the funnel formed by the parachute, and flames were leaping upward toward the base of the balloon. With dull desperation Paul Dodd kicked the sticks and burning peat from the load ring, and they fell, making streaks of fire through the dark below. Then, disregarding the flaming fabric, he reached up and tore frantically at the tall funnel. It would not come away, and he put his weight upon it to jerk it free from the appendix so that fire would not get to the balloon. If he must fall in the swamp, it was not to be in flames.

The funnel came away, the fire with it. Dodd lost his balance and fell backward from the load ring. The fabric of the funnel left his hands and made a brilliant channel through the sky. Dodd, in his bridle, was stopped short, and the shock knocked all consciousness from his exhausted brain.

Without fire to sustain it, the balloon settled. From four thousand feet it descended with steadily increasing speed to fifteen hundred, and there, with the envelop folding up inside itself, it parachuted of its own free will and went on down more slowly. The wind was strong, and drifted this strange night-flying craft ten miles beyond the railroad bordering the swamp, dumping it in the backyard of a cracker's little farm. Paul Dodd was still unconscious when it struck the ground; he came to an hour later, demanding twenty-five dollars for a parachute descent and describing in detail in his delirium a walk of fifteen miles he had just made through northern Oklahoma to come after it.

* * *

Mosquitos leave the swamp in Winter. Last February I set out duck hunting with old John, who lives at the swamp's edge. We had a dugout, and John poled precariously. I had heard the story of Paul Dodd from other sources, so I knew it to be true. We confirmed it when we came, one day, upon a rotting balloon basket half submerged beside a hummock of thick brush. At one side, exploring, we found the metal parts of an expensive camera. John, when I prompted him sufficiently, told me of a night when he had seen fire falling from the sky.

We found nothing, saw nothing, and since have heard no word of the photographer. A million years from now some archeologist may wonder at the finding of a human skeleton in the peat bog that will be there then.

The Ringer

By JAMES W. BENNETT

IT WAS a queer little Anglo-American aristocracy into which Herr Anton Voegel tried to insinuate himself. Foochow, China, had formerly been one of the world's great tea ports. Americans and Britons had made huge fortunes there and had built themselves palaces on the south bank of the Min.

Voegel came to Foochow with a Chinese wife, five Eurasian children and much money. He went into tea exporting. After a few mistakes he began to snatch the entire trade.

It became apparent that he wanted some outside contacts, for he applied for membership in the Foochow Race Club. After a stormy meeting, during which three erstwhile tea barons verged on apoplexy, he was elected. The club was afraid to refuse him.

Then came the Spring races. Nothing was discussed except the merits of the various ponies, Foochow-bred Kirghis stock, short of legs.

Voegel had bought the mounts of one of his hard-pressed competitors. Herr Anton's clerks, however, although demons at a ledger, were singularly awkward on pony-back. One by one his mounts were beaten.

It was thought that he would do no more racing. Then, a month before the Fall meet, a rumor arose that he had unloaded a pony from a steamer. No one had seen the horse; and if Voegel had exercised it he must have done so at night. Rendered suspicious, the club governors went in a body and solemnly read him the rules of the meet. The ponies must not be over a certain weight or height. He answered gruffly that he knew the rules, then became obstinately silent. The first two days of the meet, all went well. The Voegel mounts lost, gladdening the foreign colony's hearts.

Then came the main race of the meet. As the ponies pranced toward the barrier, the occupants of the little grandstand gave a gasp. Towering above the tiny Kirghis steeds was a large horse.

"Against the rules!" howled the judges. "Against the rules!"

"Maype it iss," said Herr Anton calmly. "Maype it iss. But dot horse runs in dis race or you'll all pe tamn sorry! I varn you!"

Unheeding, the judges ordered the enormous animal away. That night they voted Voegel out of the Race Club forever. The next morning, racing fans found a policeman guarding the track; across the gate a notice:

> This property leased by Li Waung to Anton Voegel for period of one hundred moons.

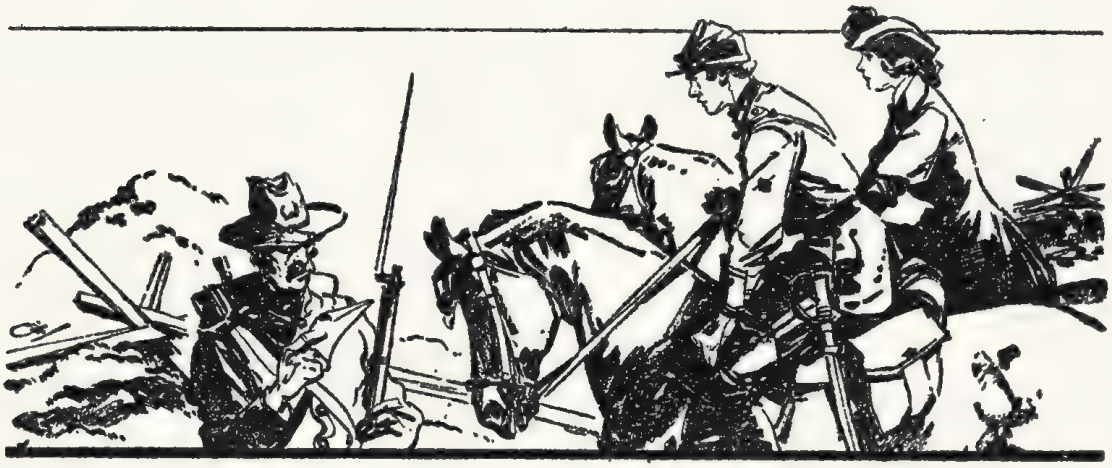
The foreign colony was shocked and dazed. Didn't the Race Club have a lease on the track? The club secretary dolefully shook his head. No, he'd only been renting the land from year to year.

That night Herr Anton imbibed long and freely of good Rhine wine. Perhaps it was the double intoxication—wine and revenge. But, whatever the cause, he was found dead the next morning on the floor under his dining table.

Again the foreign colony permitted itself a free breath. A deputation visited the Chinese widow to purchase the lease. But Voegel had left a will. Herr Anton had willed himself a last supreme triumph: that he be interred in the center of the race course and that it henceforth was to be used only as a cemetery. Thus, surrounded by the conical green mountains of Foochow, he was buried.

Continuing WHEN THE

A Novel by the Author of "Days of 49"



The Story Thus Far:

RAND LANISTER, accompanied by old Bill Raze, left Texas in the Spring of 1861 to join the Union Army. His mother, a Northern woman who had never been happy in the slave-holding South, had before her death made Rand promise never to fight against the men of her family in the event of the war which she knew must come.

Rand's defection of the South estranged his father; angered his cousin, Val Lanister; puzzled his cousin Judith who loved Rand no less than her suitor, young Willamotte—but it did not prejudice Rand's uncle and godfather, General Lanister of the Confederate Army, against him. The general, respecting Rand's decision to go North, gave him and Bill Raze a pass through the tightly guarded Confederate lines at the port of New Orleans.

The general's pass was almost Rand's undoing, for when he reached Washington to enlist, that and his Southern accent led the military police to suspect he was a spy. Major Clarky, a political scoundrel who used his position as provost-marshal for personal gain, assisted by Captain Terris, another treacherous opportunist in the military police, promptly railroaded Rand into the old Capitol Prison.

A young actress, Laura Lorraine, who knew the Lanister family, secured General Heckle's permission to interview Rand. Satisfied that he was a Lanister, she persuaded Colonel William Tecumseh Sherman to release Rand so that he might enlist.

Grateful but indiscreet, Rand hurried to Miss Lorraine's house and was admitted by Mrs. Margate, the housekeeper. Despite rumors that Laura was a spy serving both sides, Rand confided in her the reason for his coming North. Then he bluntly asked her why she cultivated such questionable characters as Major Clarky and Captain Terris.

Before Miss Lorraine had time to reply, Major Clarky, suspecting Rand's presence, arrived. Jealous and enraged, he would have shot Rand if Laura had not anticipated his move and drawn her own revolver, killing him to save young Lanister's life.

To shield Laura, who now had twice been his benefactor, and to protect himself, Rand, with the help of Bill Raze, secretly buried Major Clarky's body. Rand kept the dead man's revolver, a handsome weapon.

In his regiment Rand was an inconspicuous private till one day during a review. His sergeant, Gnowtal, was trying to get some discipline out of his rowdy men. Suddenly Rand broke out of the ranks and seized Colonel Sherman's horse from the orderly who was leading it. An officer of Sherman's staff, whose mount had wheeled and bolted, had fallen from the saddle with his feet caught in the stirrups; and Rand, seeing the officer dragged across the field, dashed to the rescue.

Bill Raze shouted encouragement. General Sherman, although astonished by the unmilitary seizure of his horse, yelled:

"Good, lad! That's it! Ride like hell!"

BRAVEST TREMBLED

GORDON YOUNG

RAND straightened, settling in the saddle, then leaned forward, lying almost flat along the horse's neck. Without trying to reach the stirrups, adjusted for Colonel Sherman's long legs, he drove his heels up into the flanks, prodding and gouging frantic speed out of the horse; and so, plunging with bound after bound, he rode furiously at the runaway. Moist turf flew backward from the flying hoofs.

The sergeant faced the astonished company that had lapsed into every attitude of staring:

"Steady—steady! As y'were. Damn't, steady! Order harm! Right dress! Front. Steady-ee-e!"

It was a ragged dress. Faces waggled out of the front with slanting looks toward the officers who were mounting to ride after Rand. Sergeant Gnowtal strode up and down the line, glaring and snapping:

"Front! Front! Steady-ee!"

Discipline mysteriously laid hold of men who did not understand why they stood in their tracks when every conscious impulse was to break ranks and go straggling in gaping pursuit. The sergeant repeated grimly:

"Steady, boys! Steady!"

Sherman whipped his long legs over the orderly's horse. Rattling cries went up through the camp. Some companies at drill under less able sergeants broke ranks, running as if routed. Men dashed from tents, trotting with eyes staring, calling—

"What's happened?"

Men far down the road saw Rand lean as if falling and, reaching out as he rode headlong, overtaking the runaway. As he came alongside the fleeing horse Rand changed horses at full gallop. The colonel's horse, now riderless, veered off, checking its pace, trotting nervously, with stirrups flapping, shy of capture.

Rand's long body bobbed, tossing on the aide's horse; and then he caught the loose reins, sat upright, jerking, and reined the horse back on its haunches. Holding the reins high and taut with the right hand, Rand hooked a knee against the saddle and dipped to reach the left stirrup, trying to free the foot that was locked by its spur and slim, polished boot.

A burly teamster ran forward to the horse's head, gripping the bridle rings. A lank sutler came with spraddling stride, reaching for the stirrup, wanting to help but not to be hurt by the trampling of the horse.

Colonel Sherman sprang from his galloping horse, rocking unsteadily backward and taking short, braced steps until he got his balance, then ran up. He flung the timid sutler aside casually, stooped to the horse's heels and lifted the battered man, taking the weight off the stirrup. With staccato, impatient words he told the sutler to pull boot and spur off the foot.

The aide's foot came free. Rand noticed that the sock was lilac colored and thought hazily that a man with lilac socks had no business on horseback. Then he got a good look at the unconscious, black bearded face and, though it was bruised and bleeding, he recognized Captain Terris.

Rand dismounted, leaving the burly

teamster gripping the cheek straps. As soon as the reins fell the teamster gripped them in one hand and, hauling his arm away back, struck the horse on the nose.

"I'll larn ye to drag a nice feller like him—"

Crack! The teamster struck again. The horse drew up its head in pain, and dragged the cursing teamster a few steps.

"Whoa! Damn yer slab-sided, spavined soul. Whoa! Hear me? Whoa! Whoa when I tell yer!"

He spat tobacco juice and looked at the group of soldiers whose attention his loud cursing had attracted.

"Ever' day I han'le wuss critters an' larn 'em! Is that off'cer kilt?" The teamster had the solicitous manner of one hopeful that his rescue did not come too late.

"Neck's broke!"

The voice was almost jubilant. Tragedy made the information more important.

"Kill folks, will ye?"

Again the teamster's fist cracked against the horse's head.

Every muscle in Rand's body twitched with angered readiness to fight.

He hated a man—any man—who would strike a horse on the head. There was too much of a crowd. He flinched from making a commotion before all these strangers. Also, he wanted to get off somewhere and think. Somehow it was like a sort of bad joke on himself to learn that the injured man was Captain Terris. In a vague, joyless way he was not sorry that Captain Terris had been dragged and battered. He wished the horse would knock down and trample that teamster.

The sutler, running his thumbs up and down under his suspenders, was saying—

"Me an' the kernal—"

A blouseless boy caught at Rand's arm.

"How 'd ye ever larn thet hoss trick!"

Rand pushed the curious youth's hand away, not answering.

A squirming circle of soldiers pressed in, craning their necks about the men who were carrying Captain Terris away.

"Neck's brokt!"

"'Tain't! 'Tis his ankle!"

"Wonder his brains wasn't all battered out!"

"I got a peek an' looks like they are."

Colonel Sherman had mounted an officer's horse and was riding off.

An officer on foot pushed through the stragglers about the teamster. A corporal with pipe-clayed belt followed at his heels. The officer took the reins in peremptory silence from the teamster's hand and eyed the bushy face that grinned in expectation of praise.

"You are under arrest!"

"W-why—w-whatever fur?"

"Colonel Sherman's order."

The officer flipped a hand instructively toward the corporal.

"I he'ped save thet off'cer!" The teamster was aggrieved and disheartened.

The officer fitted his foot into the stirrup, spoke as he rose to the saddle.

"For striking this horse!"

The corporal laid a hand on the teamster's arm.

"C'm along!"

RAND did not return near the company, but went to his tent. He had a slightly guilty feeling, almost as if skulking. It was dim and sultry in the tent. Flies hung in dark splotches overhead. Men said flies made the air pure—ate up the bad smells. Disturbed by his coming, they buzzed and alighted stickily on his face. He brushed at them and sat down on his folded blanket.

He knew he ought to have returned to the company. He did not like the men in the company. It had taken anger, a readiness to fight and the sergeant's rebuke to make them quit imitating his accent. Others, curious and trying to be friendly, pestered him about the South, as if Southerners were a

strange race with amazing customs.

His thoughts shifted to Captain Terris. He grinned a little and muttered cusswords at the same time. He wondered whether Miss Laura would have been glad or sorry if Terris's head had hit a stump?

"Not much sorry, I bet. Somehow, I bet, she is making a fool out o' him. She'd make a fool out o' any man. One out o' me too, maybe, 'cause I keep my mouth shut when I know she is a Rebel spy. I sho' wish I could find out why she talks so queer about how I ought to know who she is and why Terris thinks she hates the South. That shows he is a biggeh fool than me! Old Bill was smarter than anybody. He guessed that she was Southern purt 'neah as soon as he laid eyes on her."

Babbling voices, clicking and rattling gear and the scuffle of feet told him the company had been dismissed. Raucous voices, cheerily inane, boomed through the hum. These fellows had a notion that loud talk was witty.

Black shadows struck the tent. A hand grasped the flap and was pulled away in a flurry of scuffling. A man lurched forward, gleeful at being the first in. Good natured struggling blocked the entrance, then three or four surged through together.

"Well, I'm a dumswoggled catfish!" yelled Dunkson, a rangy youth with carrot colored hair and wide buck teeth. He had pride in never using cusswords, but knew some mighty good substitutes. "Har he is! Hello, Ran', ol' hoss-walloper! Gosh ding my gran'pap's galluses, but you kin ride!"

Another boy slapped Rand's shoulders and dropped on the blanket beside him.

"I thought you'd gone clear crazy, but man alive!"

"What'd the kurnel say ter yer?"

"Was he kilt?"

"Name's Terris I heered tell. Uster be in our brigade."

"Yeah, in the 69th. Them's all wild Irishmen."

"My, but didn't he squeal when he fell?" exclaimed young Dunkson.

"Wouldn't you squealed with yer foot hitched up in a blamed stir'p? You'd yelled like a pig stuck under a fence, I bet."

"I brunged your gun up, Rand!" Tommy—a child, nothing more—wanted approval. "I brunged your gun up!"

Fellows often tormented Tommy into losing his temper. They liked to hear his cuss and have him strike them in flurried wrath, pummeling their plow-hardened muscles.

Dunkson bared his buck teeth and asked confidentially—

"Ran', you ever been in a circus?"

"Hell, no."

"Then whar'd you larn to hop a hoss an' ride thetaway? Me, I been round hosses all my life!" Mouth and eyes blended in complimentary wonderment.

Rand reached aimlessly for a twig between his feet, took the twig and made little purposeless scratches in the dirt.

"Dunk, can yo' milk a cow?"

"Me? If she's got tits I can! Why you ask a blame fool thing like that?"

"Because." Rand dropped the twig, rubbed out the marks with his toe and straightened. "Because I've been round cows—I was bo'n in a sort of what yo' all up heah call a cow pasture, mighty big one, though—all my life, and I can't milk. Neveh tried. But I growed up on hossback!"

A man who had started to leave the tent ducked back.

"Here's the sarge!"

Other heads were poked out a little furtively and jerked back.

"He's comin'!"

Apprehension rustled in their lowered tones. Nonchalantly mumbled phrases did not restore assurance. A gruff voice was heard outside, and the answering, "Yes, sir, Sarge, he's in thar!" came respectfully.

"You're goin' cotch hell, Ran'!"

The little, dried up sergeant entered, stiff and grim. Men lurched and swayed back, making room, prodding

the tent slope with their heads. The sergeant blinked, clearing his eyes of sunlight. Rand sat with elbows on knees, head to one side expectantly.

"Priv't Lan'ster!"

"Heah."

"*Sir* to me!"

"Heah, suh."

"Stand up!"

Rand arose, ill tempered, reddening.

"Why didn't you come back to the company? Always come back to your company—allus! That's soldierin', Lan'ster. Now report at once to Colonel Sherman!"

Some of the boys whistled softly, thinking Rand was due to catch hell for that trivial violation; but the sergeant stiffly jabbed out his forearm, streaked with red service stripes. Rand, amazed and grateful, shook hands.

"I hate like all hot hell," said the sergeant with his snappish bark, "to lose the only man in the comp'ny that's got sense enough to know when to break ranks agin orders!" Sergeant Gnowtal did not smile. He glared with warning, not unfriendly. "Never do it again! Not once in thirty years before have I seen it be right." His head trembled in jerky affirmation.

Sergeant Gnowtal pivoted and strode from the tent.

SHERMAN greeted Rand cordially and stuck out a long arm. He had a cigar in his mouth, and his hat in hand. His hair was rumpled. The high forehead seemed to be touched with the beginning of baldness. It had looked so from youth. There was a driving glance in his eyes, almost a frown above them. A remote twinkle and shy, lurking smile was all that kept Sherman from an habitual scowl. Always reckless of speech and energetic of manner, he demanded—

"Do you know anything about orderly duty—mounted orderly?"

Rand reluctantly told the truth.

"Neither do I," said Sherman, dusting his hat by slapping it against his leg. "But we'll all learn our duties before this war is over. You can ride. I think that must be one of the things a mounted orderly ought to do. Or an aide! Bring round a couple of horses."

"Which ones, sir?"

"In the Army, boy, always take the best. In this case, it's the roan. Captain Terris was badly mussed up—sprained ankle and a cut on his forehead. Won't dance for awhile, which will show the fair maids of Washington what a terrible thing war is. But I'll bet General Heckle sends him back to my 69th!" Sherman's tone indicated plainly enough that he did not want Terris returned to duty in his command. "Rand, why the hell didn't you go into the cavalry?"

"I wanted to stay close to Bill."

Sherman chuckled.

"Old Bill has told me how to win the war." He scratched his bristly chin, grinning. "And he probably knows as much about how to do it as the rest of us!"

At that moment the tall, dark, somewhat mysterious man known as Silliker, called captain though always in civilian dress, came up—a hollow eyed man, with a soft voice and a quiet, easy manner, very soldierly but gracious, and unmistakably a gentleman.

Sherman greeted him warmly, which did much to make Rand think that perhaps the captain was all right. He stared at Rand with curious intentness; and Sherman, as if understanding, looked from one to the other.

The colonel and captain went apart and talked together, Sherman listening impatiently even if with friendliness. Sherman was nearly always an impatient listener. His quick mind seemed to catch everything the other person was going to say long before he said it.

In leaving, the captain paused again, looking curiously at Rand.

"There's a fellow," said Sherman indignantly, flinging a hand toward the captain as he walked off, "that knows more about war—or at least actual

fighting—than any man in America! Has seen more of it, and he can't get a commission. West Pointer, too. Been all over the world. Everything from a private to a general. Now he's a kind of detective for the War Department. Notice how he looked at you? He says you and he are cousins or something."

"What's his name? I noticed he's tried fo' to talk to me a time or two, but I neveh heard his name."

"Silliker."

"Neveh heard of him."

"You've surely heard of the Sillikers."

"I neveh did, Colonel."

"Wrath of God!" Sherman laughed. "The old Senator would curl up and die of chagrin if he thought there was a man, woman or child that hadn't heard of him! Such is fame! Why, old Silliker really had some hopes of getting elected President down South instead of Jeff Davis. That's why the War Department in its wisdom—such as it has—will let Joe Silliker there be a detective, know all its secrets and scandals, but won't give him a commission!"

CHAPTER VIII

ON TO RICHMOND

RAND found himself in the saddle night and day, and liked that. He liked not so well the waiting at horses' heads in night rains for Colonel Sherman to reappear from conferences.

Rand thought he never would get used to the dangling saber that, for some reason, mounted orderlies were supposed to wear; but he liked carrying a revolver, and got a holster for Major Clarky's gun which Mr. Raze had been keeping for him.

Also, Rand began a little furtively, as if partly ashamed of something so like weakness, to try to look as soldierly as some other orderlies. He had his belt shortened, got a tailor to reset his coat buttons and fit the baggy trousers. One of the aides, who found his boots too small for him, offered Rand a pair of jackboots—a fine, tall pair.

Rand, remembering Sergeant Gnowtal's oaths against unregulation uniform, said—

"I'm obliged, sir, but maybe a private oughtn't to weah 'em!"

Colonel Sherman, overhearing, strode forward.

"Wear 'em!" he said. "Great Scott, if they fit, wear 'em! Officers and men are wearing carpet slippers, plumed nightcaps and shakos with tassels; and among the officers especially, I suspect diapers! A man that can sit a horse has certainly got a right to wear riding boots!"

He was sent with dispatches even into Washington, waited before McDowell's headquarters and watched officers, comparing them with Colonel Sherman, unfavorably.

Once he caught sight of a huge man sitting in a carriage, his massive head thrown back, and his bulging breast glittering with gold. The ponderous face was ruddy and solemnly confident; but also conscious of the admiring crowd's eyes.

From the sidewalks the crowd shouted, "On to Richmond!" Tiny handkerchiefs fluttered like captive butterflies from under silken parasols. Women called in shrill tremolo, "On to Richmond!" The shouts became a roar: "On to Richmond! On to Richmond!" The massive head nodded as if accepting military instruction from the mob.

Later, with tear-dimmed eyes, old General Scott was to tell the President—

"I was a coward to yield prematurely to popular clamor!"

Rand remembered the ponderous old general's ruddy pride and the mob's clamor when, a few weeks later, a broken Army lay scattered and trembling on the banks of the Potomac. Then officers and men snarled with whimpering savagery—

"Scott, the damned old Virginian, betrayed us!"

GENERAL HECKLE, chagrined that one of his officers had made a spectacle of bad riding, returned Captain Terris to his regiment, the 69th New York; and he sent for Rand to thank him.

Terris had a permanent scar on his forehead, not defacing enough to satisfy Rand, particularly after the interview. Terris was quite at ease, or seemed so. Rand perspired irritably. There was a smooth, evil slyness about Terris. Rand understood how Miss Laura felt that his presence cast a shadow, chill and foreboding.

Terris could, or thought he could, lie out of any difficulty or embarrassment.

"Ha, Lanister! You pay back favors quickly, don't you?"

"Hmm?" Rand was astonished but noncommital.

"You see, when I found out you were from Texas, I said to myself, 'The boy must be all right!' Of course," he explained with sly, confidential persuasiveness, "I couldn't let Laura Lorraine, who hates all Lanisters, or Major Clarky—poor devil—know how I felt. But I quietly spoke to General Heckle. And it was really through me, you know, that Colonel Sherman took an interest in your case. See?"

Rand flushed awkwardly, but was even a little fascinated at such barefaced lying. He wanted to call Terris a liar and poke a fist into that smug, sly face, with its shoe-button eyes; but had learned that hitting an officer was a monstrous crime in the Army. So he held his tongue.

"I suppose you wonder why Miss Lorraine hates your family, eh?" Terris asked glibly and smirked. "I'll tell you, Lanister. You hate that mess of Rebel Lanisters, too, or you wouldn't be here! I used to be in New Orleans—was a lawyer for a cotton firm—so I know what I'm talking about. Your cousin did everything in his power to ruin her good name. Made a terrible scandal. Southern chivalry, bah! He circulated a horrible story about her, and it was false, utterly false! Some day I'll prove it!"

Terris was all afire with gallant anger, stuck out his chest, jerked back his shoulders and glared.

"What'd he say?" Rand asked, curious, hoping to hear.

"Oh, I'd never repeat it, not even to deny it! No, no! But you can't blame her, can you, for hating all Lanisters after that? And for hating the South, too, because everybody down there believed it—everybody but me. And I, thank God, am Northern. I am almost the only person in Washington who knows about the scandal. And it is utterly false. I can prove it when the time comes. Hope to God I get a chance to meet that cousin of yours in battle! That is why I asked to be restored to my regiment, to get into the field, not sit around here in Washington!"

Rand fidgeted, wanting to get away, mumbled and started to go.

"Just a minute, Lanister. By the way, what does the colonel say about discharging our regiment? We're three-months men, you know, and our time is almost up. The boys want to go home. What's he going to do about it?"

Rand almost said:

"That's a hell of a way for a fellow that wants to get into a battle to be talking." But instead he replied soberly, "If I knew, I couldn't tell you. Orderlies ain't supposed fo' to talk."

Rand went away thinking—

"Wish he'd fall off a hoss again!"

One day Rand was put on report for insolence and summoned before Colonel Sherman. The young adjutant, himself a cavalryman and West Pointer, read the charge in a severe tone.

"Yes'r, I sho'ly told Major Douglas he could go plumb to hell!" Rand admitted.

Colonel Sherman's fingers twitched inside his unbuttoned coat. He sat with his long legs crossed and his hair rumpled, scowling at Rand.

"Why, Lanister?" asked the young adjutant, rustling his papers, when he saw that the colonel was not yet ready to speak.

"Well, suh, he said would I come and tell 'im just as soon as I learned the Army was moving. Said he had some trunks fo' to pack."

The adjutant set his mouth hard to control the flickering twitch at the corners and glanced at Colonel Sherman. The colonel cleared his throat.

"Hrr-r-rmf! It was damned indiscreet of the major to make such a request of the commanding officer's orderly. But, Orderly, in the Army, officers are not invited to go to hell by privates until they are out of earshot! We officers make quite a point of that. So don't let it happen again!"

Neither Rand nor the other youngsters in the brigade knew enough about Army life to be properly astonished at Colonel Sherman's informality when it suited him to be informal. No man had a straighter back or a harder glance. For all his rash impulsiveness, he kept what he liked to himself and no one guessed the things he wanted concealed. He could be witheringly wrathful and, even if slack about certain trivialities and detail, he was a merciless disciplinarian when the principle of discipline was involved. Sherman was appallingly blunt toward superiors, but obeyed orders with a promptness and resolution that is rare in Northern records; and, rarer still, the few times Sherman was defeated in battle he offered no excuses and blamed no one, saying—

"I assume all responsibility!"

It was at this time that Sherman was tormented by certain regiments, especially the 69th New York—an Irish regiment, three-months men, who claimed their enlistment had expired. Their officers—and, it was suspected, especially the lawyer Terris—encouraged them to demand that they be discharged.

Sherman maintained, and the War Department confirmed, that they were engaged for three months from the time they were mustered in, not from the time of their enrollment.

One night, when riding back to camp, Colonel Sherman called Rand to his side. He did not speak for a time, then said explosively:

"Breakfasts at the Astor House, girls with posies for gun muzzles, schoolboys wanting to dodge classes, and all the damned tom-rot of bands and stump speeches, have given our side a fool's notion about war. This is a time when the bravest men in the nation tremble, or would if they had sense enough to know that this is war! War, you understand! Not a parade! And if any of my regiment refuse to go into battle because they claim their enlistment is up, I'll have them shot as mutineers. Tonight I told General Scott and McDowell just that. And, Orderly?"

"Yes'r."

"Tomorrow morning present my compliments to Major Douglas; tell him to pack his damn trunks and leave them behind! We are moving forward to find out whether or not Rebels will run if we say, *boo!* as recruiting agents and newspapers have told our boys!"

THE camp roused, stirring jubilantly. Bugles tooted, drums clattered, officers pranced. There was hilarious shouting and the disorderly hurry of tumult.

"Goin' ter Richmon', by gum!"

"Yep, ter hang ol' Jeff on a sour apple tree!"

"'Ray!"

Boys, who would have nursed a sick calf tenderly, yelped in eagerness, thinking they wanted to pull the rope that would strangle a dignified, rather scholarly gentleman, in poor health and much pain, whose personal vanity and vindictiveness were to trouble the South far more than his capabilities thwarted the North; yet, in one respect, Jefferson Davis was very like Abraham Lincoln. They were resolute men. Neither, amid

the worst disasters, wavered or thought of yielding.

When the North was weary and faint hearted, and the copperheads, and Horace Greeley who was not a copperhead, yapped for peace, Lincoln sleeplessly walked up and down the halls of the White House, barefoot and in a too-short nightgown, saying to God, "The Union must be saved!" And when Lee was on the verge of surrender, Davis walked with quiet dignity from the church where the message reached him, left Richmond, joined Johnston's army and begged his generals to fight—to go on and fight, never yielding.

The tents of Camp Corcoran were not struck. This puzzled the privates, who tried to know all about the why and wherefore of everything, until some enthusiast conjectured:

"We ain't to be bothered with them things. We're goin' to stay in hotels on the way down South!"

" 'Ray!"

"Soon be over now, fellers!"

"Yep. I tol' my pap I'd be home fer Spring plowin'!" a youth bawled with the air of one who never broke promises.

Men gobbled breakfast. Knapsacks were stuffed bulgingly tight, and extra boots tied outside, together with kettles and fancy lanterns—even campstools—and whatever else Yankee hucksters had peddled to make life on the battlefield pleasant. One boy got out an umbrella that a solicitous mother had commanded him to take. Some company officers put rocking chairs in baggage wagons. Flags and regimental colors were unfurled. Even the mutinous 69th cheered, and their anxious regimental colonel was gratified. Sherman had promised, if battle followed, to give them a chance to distinguish themselves.

Companies hastily formed and stood about by the hour, waiting expectantly. The 2nd Wisconsin, hard muscled Northerners, all in gray, were first to be led through the camp. Other regiments fidgeted enviously.

Rand, back from carrying dispatches, saw Mr. Raze sitting on a stump, gazing with profound distaste at the seeming, and partly real, confusion.

Mr. Raze had been missing for days. Rand looked him over, noted the traces of red mud as if he had walked on creek banks down where the soil was famously red and soon to be a deeper scarlet.

"Where you been, Bill?"

"Jus' pokin' around, son."

"Special duty?"

"I reckon." Mr. Raze grew meditative. "The feller asked—"

"What fellow?"

"The colonel lent me to a feller over yon way. This feller asked, 'Don't you want your pass?' 'What f'r?' says I. 'So you kin come in past the pickets.' I says, ' 'F I couldn't slip by all the sentries an' pickets I seen in this Army, my ol' skelp 'ud be dried hard as a bleached bone long ago!' "

"You've been scouting?"

"Um-hm. The feller said, 'Go an' see 'f you kin find some Rebels.' I come back las' night an' told 'im if he was lookin' for Rebs they was a plentiful supply across the crick below a place called Centerville. An' they is. A whole hell's plenty. I et with 'em f'r two days. Nice bunch o' Mississippi fellers. Rand, don't you go get no wrong notions like most fellers up here. Our folks down yon way is hankerin' f'r to fight. The feller that sent me won't b'lieve they is reg'ments from ever'where—even Louzana. He says they can't be!"

"Is that really true, Bill?"

" 'R I'm a liar." Mr. Raze spat, took up a chip and rubbed at traces of red mud on his boots. "I seen somebody, Ran'."

"From Louisiana?"

"I reckon so. That actoress girl."

"Miss Laura!"

"They's quite a lot o' social goin's on behind the lines down thataway—lots o' women and chilern, like a county fair. I was moseyin' around where some off'cers live. I seen 'er in a kerrige with an off'cer. I played like I'd lost a half

dollar in the grass an' got down on my knees huntin' it with my back toward her."

"She wouldn't have made trouble for you, Bill."

"No?" Mr. Raze grunted. "I sort o' like 'er. She's sens'ble enough to be Southern like she ort, seein' she was born there, but—"

"Don't bring that up, Bill."

"—but one thing shore, son. She ain't ever goin' make any trouble f'r me if I see her furst. You ner nobody can't foresay what a woman 'll do. 'Specially not a purty one."

"I'm glad yo' are back, Bill."

"An' I stay back till that feller the colonel lent me to comes an' says, 'Mr. Raze, sir, I apolergize. They was reg'ments from Louzana an' Texas an' Miss'ippi down thar!' You know, Ran', I won't stand f'r bein' called a liar—not even when I am. That's jus' what I told Colonel Sherman!"

"And what did he say?"

"He says I done wrong, but it'll be all right."

THE first division of the Grand Army, impatient and leg weary, waited under arms more than half the day and marched at 3 P. M, July 16th, out along the Leesburg road.

Carriages of spectators lined the wooded roadsides. Men with flowered waistcoats, women and pretty girls stood in the carriages, waving flags, hats, handkerchiefs, tossing posies and cheering the Army.

"On to Richmond!"

General Tyler, with his brilliantly tinseled staff, led. Flags and regimental colors were carried as if on parade. Dust puffed up under the ceaseless tramp of scuffling feet, dimming the uniforms, the shiny harness of wayside teams and the brightness of women's bonnets.

The recruits marched, as if wading, through the dust, deepened by the men ahead, stirring clouds of it into the faces of the men who followed. Three days' rations were in the sagging haversacks. Loaded knapsacks bumped tender backs. Coat pockets bulged with diaries in which war records were to be kept by men who made the war.

It was a hot day. Muskets grew heavier and heavier. Sweat came through shirts and coats and dust settled on the sweat. But the Army was jubilant at marching.

Rand, riding behind the tall Sherman, saw a beribboned girl standing on the driver's seat of a barouche. Her wide brimmed hat was pushed back off her head. Ringlets lay over her shoulders. He thought, "She is pretty."

She called shrilly, as if ecstatically forgetful of being overheard—

"What handsome men!"

The company abreast whooped, cheering, doffed and waved caps, pleased and proud. Of all the gosh dinged Army she had singled them out.

Sherman's 79th New York was a Scot regiment. Its colonel, Cameron, was brother to the Secretary of War and wore kilts. From time to time spectators forgot their patriotism in the yelp of, "Hi, feller! Whar's your pants?" The next day Colonel Cameron hid his kilts and wore trousers.

The column marched with muskets bayonet-tipped. The glint of steel on bobbing shoulders hazily gave the impression of a long serpent crested with glistening bristles. Halts were frequent. Men's faces began to look as if they wore translucent masks woven of dust. Their eyes peered from holes; their mouths were rimmed with dust. At every pause they sucked deeply from canteens. Later in the war they would merely rinse their mouths and spit on days even hotter than this, in deeper dust, and when the parching tang of powder smoke dried their throats. They irritably hitched their badly hung knapsacks into various positions to ease the galling pinch of unfamiliar straps. When all the carriages were passed the knapsacks seemed to grow heavier, the march

uninteresting. Empty canteens flapped on hips, but thirst was unallayed. Muddy sweat trickled down necks and itched.

Some companies paused to let those in front get far ahead. It was one thing to go out and die for the country; another to push through the kicked-up dust of comrades to get to the graveyard. Sherman, wanting the men to learn their first marching lesson right, was tireless and irritable in keeping after the laggards of his brigade. Rand galloped up and down the column with orders to close up, close up!

In going past the pretty girl on the barouche seat a second time he heard her shrill, ecstatic cry, as if she had never before said such a thing—

"What handsome men!"

The wild Irishmen of the 69th cheered her, tossed reckless compliments, making her blush.

Soon at every halt men began to leave the ranks, pitch knapsacks aside, sprawl on the shaded grass. They munched their three-day rations like picnickers.

It was hard to rise and fall in when the column moved. Anyhow, why should they? They were free-born American citizens. Besides, the column marched so sluggishly they could easily overtake it when they wanted. Some piled knapsacks and muskets in fence corners, climbed the fences and disappeared in thickets, looking for water and staying to pick berries. Men who were detached to bring them back did not return: It was cool and pleasant by some creek bank. Sweaty feet were washed, backs rested, bellies waterlogged. Officers shouted, bugles blared, soldiers whooped, calling companions.

With a musket butt Sergeant Gnowtal laid Private Wilkins of Company I in the dust for an impudent reply when leaving ranks without permission.

Wilkins bellowed:

"I'll hev yuh cor'-martialed! Cap'n, he hit me!"

Sherman, in a temper at such straggling, rode up and down the column, giving officers fits, the men hell. His horse with sidling restiveness passed Company I. Sherman's quick glance saw that every squad was filled. Wilkins's hand was raised like a pupil's in a schoolroom. His screechy voice squalled for justice.

"I been slugged by—"

"Captain Henry," Sherman called, sharply commendatory, "I compliment you and this company for its discipline and order!"

He rode on.

Company I grinned in pride and stiffened its shoulders. Jeers warned Wilkins to stop bellerin'. Men glanced proudly at the rigid Gnowtal. Captain Henry wiped his face and almost furtively watched the sergeant, feeling pathetically envious. He would gladly have traded his social standing and comfortable income for Gnowtal's capabilities.

Sherman rode down on the 69th. He said things. The wild Irish understood that sort of talk and cheered him. But as soon as he was gone they continued to straggle as much as they pleased. Officers like Terris couldn't hold them; they did not try for fear of being unpopular.

THE brigade went into camp at Vienna. Some men flopped wearily on the ground or sat about wondering what to do. Regimental and company officers had learned that tents were to be pitched in two files ten paces behind the colors. But there were no tents. So the regimental and company officers did not know what to do. They, no more than the men, understood how to bivouac.

A wood yard happened to be nearby. The men, rejoicing in the license of plunder, raided it. Except among the Northwoodsmen of the 2nd Wisconsin, the soldiers did not know how to make any but smoky or roaring fires. Coffee pots were overturned, fingers burned, bacon charred. Many, with picnicking greed, used up their three-day rations.

They grumbled at having to sleep out in the open before stacked arms.

One of Sherman's aides came along, trying the stacks. He overturned many of every company—except those of Company I. Sergeant Gnowtal himself had overturned the stacks until they, at last, were set up firmly locked. The aide complimented Captain Henry and made a favorable report. The captain sat on a log and prodded the ground with the point of his scabbard. He felt like a thief.

Rand, not relieved from duty until late, got a handful of sticks, built a little fire that an overturned plate would have smothered, made coffee in a tin cup, set it at one side to cool, sizzled bacon on the point of a stick, caught the drippings on hardtack, and squatted cross-legged with his back to a tree. He ate with slow enjoyment.

He scraped leaves together with pushes of his feet, spread his blanket, took off his boots, folded them for a pillow and lay down, scrouging about until there was a hollow place for his shoulders and hips. This part of soldiering made him feel quite at home.

CHAPTER IX

A RETURN TO WASHINGTON

A MAN with a lantern came out of the open doorway of a lighted house where a soldier and a corporal stood with fixed bayonets and, passing the horses that nodded at the hitching rack, walked directly to the tree where Rand was asleep.

"Come 'long, Rand. The colonel he wants you."

Rand sat up, blinking, rubbed his head with his knuckles, yawned, stretched and reached for his boots.

"Time is it?"

"'Bout two."

"Don't the colonel neveh sleep?"

"One eye at a time, seems like."

"Sho' does. Ho-hum, gosh. The colonel he says wah is hell. It sho' is when yo' are sleepy!"

Rand stamped his feet firmly into the tall jackboots, buckled on his revolver and saber, dusted his hat against his leg, put it on and rolled his blanket quickly.

"Hold youah lantern heah a minute," he said, drawing his revolver and beginning to inspect the caps.

The soldier lifted the lantern, but protested—

"The colonel, he's waitin'!"

"One minute mo' won't make him pull his hair—nor youahs. And a man can have mighty bad luck if a cap is off a nipple. 'Specially during a war!"

The corporal, loitering before the two-story house where Colonel Sherman, by invitation of the patriotic owner, had established his headquarters, stepped up close to Rand as he came into the light.

"Oh, you. Go on in."

Inside, a curly headed officer with hat off and coat unbuttoned sat at a table by lamplight, turning over penciled papers with the air of one trying to make sure that he had forgotten nothing. Two or three couriers sprawled wearily in chairs with their backs to the wall. They were sleepy, and frowned from under pulled-down caps at the lamplight.

"Colonel wants to see you," said the curly headed officer.

An orderly grinned at Rand with drowsy friendliness at the top of the stairs and preceded him to the front room. He knocked, calling through the door—

"Priv' Lan'ster, sir!"

Rand went in, closing the door behind him.

Colonel Sherman, with his coat off, stood near the center of the room, looking taller than ever in shirtsleeves with blue galluses over his shoulders. He was very erect and restless. His collar was opened. The ends of the little black string tie dangled. His hair was rumpled. He chewed on a half smoked, dead cigar. The wide, downy bed had not been touched.

"Lanister?"

"Yes, Colonel."

"If I find out you've lied to me, I may not succeed in getting you hanged, but by heaven I'll try!"

"Gosh a'mighty, I've neveh lied to you!"

"If you had, you'd still say just that, wouldn't you?"

Rand thought it over.

"I reckon so," he admitted. "But what's made you think maybe I have?"

Sherman's eyes hit hard when they looked at a man.

"If you can't guess, then, of course, you haven't lied."

He put the cigar quickly into his mouth, watched Rand for a moment, then faced about and strode across the room. Abruptly he turned as if to catch an unguarded look. He came back toward Rand, stopped and stared down into the boy's troubled face. Rand was tall; Sherman taller.

"Rand, what do you know of the woman who calls herself Laura Lorraine?"

"Oh, her?"

Rand's eyes did not waver. Very oddly he thought of a horse that has stumbled in climbing a rocky hillside, hoofs scrambling to regain and hold a balance. His thoughts were scrambling just that way. Sherman, keen eyed, was waiting, ready to pounce.

"Colonel, I neveh heard of her, neveh seen her, till she come to jail and had a talk with me."

"Why did she do that?"

Rand swallowed and cleared his throat.

"Well, suh, 'pears like she knew my folks. And them fellows that said I was a spy wanted her to tell 'em just who I was."

"Um-hm. Go on! Go on!"

" 'Pears like she'd told Major Clarky that onct when she was play-actin' at New Orleans she got to know the Lanister family. That's how it was."

"You are not lying, yet. But you are holding back like a stubborn mule. I won't have it. Now then, did she treat you as a friend, or as if she disliked all Lanisters—even the name?"

Rand flushed.

"As a friend, Colonel." Sherman's very silence was commanding, like an order to go on, keep talking. "But she didn't want Major Clarky or Captain Terris to know."

"How did she hide it from them?"

"In a note they didn't see me get."

"What did it say?"

"That I wasn't very smart to keep my uncle's pass, but she'd try to he'p me."

"What did you do with the note?"

"Swollered it."

"Why did she want Clarky and Terris to think she didn't like your family?"

"W'y I 'spose, Colonel, she thought they thought she oughtn't like anybody that wasn't Yankee-bo'n!"

"Do you know her name—or who she really is?"

"Yes, suh. Now I do. But I neveh heard of her till heah in Washington."

Sherman seemed to doubt that. His glance darted like a shot from ambush at Rand's face.

"Do you know her story? Know why she left New Orleans?"

"Colonel, I don't, and I'd sho' like to. She seemed to think I ought to know mo' about 'er than I do. Terris—"

"*Captain* Terris!" Sherman corrected sharply.

"Captain Terris said he was about the only one heah in Washington that knows all about who she is—"

Sherman bit on his cigar, narrowed his eyes and looked as if ready to deny that, but did not interrupt.

"—and he said my cousin Valentine told scan'lous stories about 'er, but he's a liah! She told me herself Val slapped Ter—I mean Captain Terris's face on account of her. So—"

"When did she tell you that? In the note?"

"When I went to see 'er to thank her fo'—" Rand stopped, confused.

"For what?"

"Fo' he'ping me."

"How did she help you? I thought I was the one! See here, Lanister, you are keeping something back. And right now that is just about the same as lying."

Rand nodded.

"I reckon."

He looked down, moved his feet, squeezed his hat brim, lifted his head and, meeting Sherman's hard dark eyes with steady gaze, said—

" 'Twas her told Bill to go see you."

"Hmm!" Sherman meditatively eyed the cold cigar. He laid it on a table and rubbed his bristly chin, looking aslant at Rand. "So the lady used even me for a puppet, eh?"

Rand didn't know what a puppet was and made no comment.

"You and that woman are good friends now, hmm? See her often?"

"I went one night to her house and said, 'I'm obliged, Miss.' I ain't seen her since. Colonel, it was so ha'd to tell you, 'cause she told Bill and me neveh to let you or anybody know she had put him up to telling you about me."

"Why?"

"I don't know, but I've told. I neveh meant to!"

"And you haven't seen her since? You haven't sent word to her or received any message?"

"No, sir!" Rand was glad to be emphatic and truthful after skittering about evasively on thin ice.

"She is a pretty girl, don't you think?"

"I sho' do!"

"Mmm."

Sherman frowned at the rag carpet, bit the end off a fresh cigar and ran a thumb up and down his suspenders.

"Rand, I believe you. But watch out for that woman. She is clever. She goes between the lines whenever she likes. No man, or woman either, can serve two masters or be loyal to two causes at war. So she is making a hell of a damn fool of either Beauregard or—" Sherman cleared his throat, not caring to mention his superiors by name. "I know Beauregard—know him well. And he's nobody's fool!"

Sherman turned to his coat, took out a notebook and pencil, wrote rapidly and talked as he wrote:

"I'm sending a confidential note to Captain Silliker. Don't lose it. Don't let any one see it. You are to report at once to General McDowell's headquarters at Poldrick. You'll find out why when you get there. Then you will return to Washington. So I am giving you this note. If Rebels got hold of this, they would know too much. It's about that Lorraine woman—or so she calls herself."

He ripped the page from the book and folded it quickly.

Rand took it, started to put it into his pocket, hesitated, then dropped it into the top of his jackboot.

When alone, Sherman tossed his cigar aside, took another from his pocket, lighted it hurriedly and puffed as if the cigar wouldn't draw. Sherman smoked cigars as if he hated their taste and wanted to get rid of them, one after another, as quickly as possible. He strode back and forth across the room a few times, then very hurriedly wrote another note, tore out the leaf and called the orderly.

"Orderly, tell Captain Dunn to send this to Captain Silliker at once!"

RAND, riding on alone after the courier-guide had put him on the road, wondered what could have happened to make Colonel Sherman speak of Miss Laura. Close call, that. Rand's hand absently touched Major Clarky's revolver.

He passed a picket, then two successive sentries, and came upon another division of the sleeping army clustered about camp-fires that glowed dimly through ashes. Many men sat upright, as if the better to be prepared against surprise, sleeping with their arms folded over drawn-up knees and their heads drooping. Sentries straggled wearily

over beats marked out along the bivouac, or leaned on their grounded rifles, peering at the distant darkness. Fretful voices grumbled at snorers. Men, awakened by the trotting hoofs, lifted their heads, then, reassured, lay down. The lumpish shadow blots on the ground seemed, in the stillness, to mark an army of the dead. Distant owls cried as if to drive this army away from their nightly hunting ground with weird complaining.

A cluster of wall tents, white as the dwelling place of ghosts, with dim yellowish spots of lanterns and candles showing through the canvas, indicated where the commanding general and his staff had quarters.

Rand dismounted and spoke to a sentry. The sentry called a corporal; the corporal brought a sergeant; the sergeant fetched an officer who, lifting his lantern, looked long and curiously into Rand's face.

"So you are Lanister!"

He seemed dissatisfied, as if expecting another sort of person.

"Yes'r."

"Well, come with me. Sergeant, see to his horse."

The officer led the way to a nearby tent. He tripped over a peg, almost fell, joggling the lantern, swore and kicked the peg.

"Damn such an army!"

A half amused voice within the tent called—

"My guess is that Captain Standish is somewhere near!"

The captain called back irritably—

"Yes, and that fellow Lanister is here too."

The front flap of the wall tent was stretched up overhead on poles. A camp-table, of the kind that when folded made a sort of cupboard, was near the entrance. Books and maps lay there in the light of a lantern.

An officer sat by the table in a canvas armchair. He was pleasant of face, slightly gray, slightly fat, and wore a double breasted frock coat of dark blue cloth with two rows of sparkling buttons on his breast. He had a sash of silk net with fringed ends wrapped about his waist. His shoulders were ornamented by wide epaulets with a silver spread-eagle on the strap. Before him on the table was a black hat, looped up on the right side and fastened with an eagle. Three black ostrich plumes were on the left side of the hat. A gold cord with acorn-tipped ends banded the crown.

He was merely a colonel; but, unlike the rough-and-ready Sherman, wore all the gilt and feathers to which he was entitled by rank.

Two other officers were in the tent. They were young, meticulous in new uniforms. All were attached to the staff of General Irvin McDowell, Commander of the Army under General Scott.

An unlucky man, McDowell; probably as good a soldier and as fine a gentleman as the Army had at that time. Rather too much of a trencherman for clear headed work, but he drank no liquor. By command of the War Department, he had recently taken possession of Robert E. Lee's home at Arlington—the same Robert E. Lee to whom the War Department had offered the command of the Union Army. But, though Lee did not believe in slavery and said that secession was anarchy, he conceived it his duty to share the fortunes of his Mother State, Virginia. So McDowell, under orders, took possession of Lee's estate; but he would not desecrate the home of his old friend, now enemy.

He had lived in a tent beside the house, obeying the vindictive War Department, but gallantly respecting the threshold of the enemy he loved. Later soldiers plundered and scattered through groggeries and pawnshops the plate and treasures of Robert E. Lee.

The men McDowell had gathered about him were also gentlemen—cheery, perhaps a little vain of gilt and fine cloth, yet blameless since such things were commanded by the United States Army regulations.

THE officers in the tent were flirtatiously attentive to Miss Laura, who sat with her cloak thrown back and, archly amused at their gallantry, fingered her riding whip.

As Rand stopped in the entrance, in the full light of the lantern, the amiable colonel pushed his plumed hat a little to one side, leaned forward and inspected Private Lanister.

"Lucky boy!" said the colonel with a complimentary rumble. "Out of all the Army, Miss Lorraine has asked for you."

A young captain turned from Laura and stepped near Rand, looking him up and down.

"Lanister, it must be the boots! I'll swap my shoulder straps for your jackboots!"

Laura laughed. Rand said nothing. He was glad to stand still and say nothing. At the sight of her all power of speech seemed to leave him. After Sherman's brisk and giltless headquarters, these seemed like make-believe soldiers. Even the gray old colonel was frolicsome. It was as if they did not believe there would be war—merely a parade all the way to Richmond.

Miss Laura, wearing a dark blue, dusty riding habit, sat erect and at ease, smiling guardedly—perhaps really amused. There was the glint of a silver spur on her left heel.

"Speak up!" she commanded coaxingly, looking toward Rand. "Then these gentlemen can better understand why you have been selected for a duty of which they pretend to be envious."

"I don't know what to say, and that's a fact!" Rand said with emphasis.

The colonel slapped the table with his soft palm, nodding as if something doubtful had been proved.

"You see," said Miss Laura, "he does not have to pretend. He is Southern!"

"I never thought the time would come when I wished I had been born a Rebel!" said the captain with an amusing air of regret, sighing.

"Oh, there are no lovelier women anywhere!" The gray, pink cheeked colonel gazed overhead, blandly reminiscent. "Especially at New Orleans. Ah!" He sighed as if tasting the last fragrant drop of old wine, never again to be found. "In the Mexican War we were heroes to those ladies. Now we are just damn Yanks!" He made soft, low sounds of lament. "Tut-tut. I can't yet believe there will be real fighting!"

"But you think there will be, don't you, Miss Lorraine?" the youngest officer, a lieutenant, asked hopefully.

"I have told you everything that I have been able to learn behind the Rebel lines—"

"Are their men really more gallant and chivalrous toward you than we?" asked the captain, teasing.

"Oh, I am scarcely noticed. So many ladies — really beautiful ladies — visit them."

"On to Richmond!" cried the captain, marching past her. He faced about, laughing. "We'll hold a tournament and see which side has the prettiest girls. May I be your champion?"

Rand thought of the lurid language Sherman would use if he found such playful capering at his headquarters.

"As I told you before, Colonel," said Miss Laura with the slightly weary tone of one who repeats what has already been said, "the Rebels have orders to withdraw from Fairfax Courthouse tomorrow without fighting. But just when and where and how Beauregard intends to make a stand, I can not say. Perhaps even he doesn't know."

"I wonder," asked the captain, "if it is true that Beauregard uses hair dye?"

"No unfair personalities, Captain!" The colonel touched his own gray head. "And if Tecumseh Sherman is to be believed, before we are through with this war, even you junior officers will be interested in hair dye."

"Sherman's crazy!" said the captain, amused.

"I think you are a mighty brave girl to go into the Rebel lines and bring us

information!" The colonel was flushed with admiration.

"I suspect they have people who come and go as they like within our lines too," Laura suggested in a tone that seemed to reproach the Union's laxness.

"No, no," said the colonel, "we are very strict!"

"They don't send us any pretty spies." The playful captain sounded regretful. "Toward all others we are cold blooded Yankees! I'm glad they don't suspect you, down there. But why don't they, a little?"

"But, as a Canadian, am I not a neutral? And I have old acquaintances there, too! Of course, they do ask lots and lots of questions about what the Union is doing; but what can a woman know of military affairs?"

The officers laughed. Rand thought—

"My holy gosh, she sho'ly does know how to make fools out o' fellows!"

LAURA arose, saying she must go now. The officers stirred with brisk helpfulness. The flirtatious captain lifted the dark cloak from the back of the camp-chair, holding it for her. The colonel called an orderly, telling him to bring Miss Lorraine's horse and Lanister's; then put on his plumed hat and offered his arm, swaggering a little.

Outside, the captain knelt almost to the dust below the stirrup of the side-saddle, laying his hands palm-up on his right knee, offering them as a riding block. Miss Laura thanked him, protesting a little, but as if pleased. She drew her long skirt ankle high, stepped lightly on the captain's palm and, with a helpful push from the hands of the colonel and the boyish lieutenant, settled in the saddle.

She lifted her whip in a gesture of farewell. The colonel raised his plumed hat. The captain, wiping his fingers with a handkerchief, waved the handkerchief.

Laura's horse, lightly touched with a spur, leaped into a gallop and Rand followed. Twice they were challenged and he dismounted, walking forward with the countersign. Each time the sentry gaped to see a woman pass. There was no picket outpost on the road to Washington.

When they were beyond the last sentry Laura checked her horse.

"Aren't you curious, Rand?"

Rand, guardedly laconic, said—

"I reckon."

She flecked the whip lightly on his arm.

"How have you been?"

"Fine."

"No troubles?" The question was confidentially low with oblique inquiry about the Major Clarky affair.

He stroked the jackboot in which lay Colonel Sherman's note about "that Lorraine woman."

"Oh, nothing much serious. On'y, tonight I had to tell Colonel Sherman it was you put Bill up to go see 'im. He's a mighty suspicious man—and smart. You sending for me this way must've made him wonder."

"He may wonder all he likes!" Her assurance seemed a little petulant. "But you see, Rand, I am really a Union spy. It was not I, but General Heckle, who sent for you tonight!"

"What's he want of me?"

"He will explain to you, Rand. But you do believe me, don't you?"

"I believe if he's sendin' fo' me it's 'cause you've put him up to it."

"But I mean you do believe I am really a Union spy?"

"No'm. I know gosh blame well you ain't!"

"Rand!" Miss Laura was startled. "Did you tell Colonel Sherman that tonight?"

"I did not!"

Laura's glance in the starlight was admiring. They rode in silence a little way before she asked—

"But, Rand, if you believe I am not loyal to the Union, are you being loyal when you conceal your suspicions about me from, for instance, Tecumseh Sher-

man?"

Rand patted his jackboot nervously.

"I don't care whetheh I am or not. If the Union can't win this war without me telling— But I reckon it can. Betteh had, or it'll get most gosh-awful licked. I ain't going to tell!"

"No? Why not, Rand?"

"You know. 'Cause I don't feel like telling! Keeping my mouth shut is the on'y way I can pay you back. Maybe they can catch you anyhow. You are dealin' with mighty dangerous work."

Laura laughed.

"But, Rand, I am not Southern."

"You are, too. You said so!"

"Not in sympathy, I mean. Are you quite sure that you never heard of me? Of Laura Willamotte, who was driven from her home in disgrace—miserable disgrace? How could any woman be Southern after that?"

"I don't believe you." It was a simple statement, not argumentative.

"But it is true, Rand!"

"'Tain't."

"Listen to me, you dear silly boy. You heard what I told the officers there at General McDowell's headquarters. The Rebels have been ordered to withdraw before the advance of the Union Army tomorrow. Would a Southern sympathizer give the enemy such military information?"

"I reckon one did. That is, if you told 'em the truth."

"You are a Lanister and have the family trait." She was not reproachful, but amused and approving. "Obstinacy."

"You are Southern, an' look it."

"I believe you mean that as a compliment, Rand?"

"I meant it as a warnin'. W'y do you think folks think you are a French-Canadian? I neveh seen a Canadian lady. But yo' look enough like Judith fo' to be her sister!"

"Now I know you are trying to say nice things to me. And supposing I were to tell you, Rand, that Judith herself is over there with the Rebel army? Would you still want to go—and fight your own family?"

"No. But I wouldn't believe you."

"But she is!"

"You can just stop! I won't believe you. You make fools out o' fellows if they listen to you!"

"So perhaps you won't believe that I met Captain Valentine Lanister at Manassas yesterday?"

"Might that; 'cause I've heard soldiers from Louisiana and Miss'ippi are—"

"Oh, you have?" Laura was surprised and a little alarmed. "How did you happen to learn that?" She added, "Hear it, I mean?"

"We got some smart fellows in our Army too. But what's Val doing oveh there?"

"He isn't with any troops from Louisiana." Miss Laura's tone subtly denied that there were any troops from Louisiana at Manassas. "He quarreled with his father. I think you know why. Then he resigned his commission and came to Richmond. He is now captain and volunteer aide on the staff of his friend, General Beauregard."

"I bet if Terris knows that he'll have cramps so bad he gets sick leave."

"Oh, tell me, did Captain Terris thank you for saving his neck?"

"Yes. He lied some. I think if I'd knowed who that hoss was dragging I wouldn't have been in no such powerful hurry. Does he know you are a spy?"

"Merciful heaven, no! But why do you keep calling me a spy? I am, but a Union spy."

"I hope you can prove it if—if anything eveh happens to make folks wonder."

Rand stroked his boot, tempted. He owed her gratitude, and somehow liked her more than he felt he ought. But he was a sworn soldier and would not betray Sherman.

"I can, Rand. General Heckle will vouch for me."

"Are you sho' Terris is the only man that knows who you are—I mean all about you?"

"He doesn't know *all* about me, that's certain!" Laura laughed softly. "He thought I couldn't like you, Rand."

"I mean, is he the only one who knows you are Miss Willamotte and not Miss Lorraine, as you call yo'self?" Pause. "I know something now that's puzzled me a heap!" Rand spoke with conviction. "You've played friends with Terris just so he'd he'p you bamboozle General Heckle, ain't you? Who-all knows who you really are, hm?"

"You know who I am, Rand."

"That ain't what I mean." He was annoyed by her evasiveness and hint of teasing. "Supposin' a lot of otheh folks know too?"

"If so, then they would know why I ought to hate the South. No Southern girl ever suffered a greater disgrace, Rand. Southern girls have bad tempers, are unforgiving and vindictive, aren't they?"

"You ain't. Even if we're s'posed to hate each otheh just 'cause ouah fathers quarreled, you got me out of jail when you thought I was Southern."

LAURA, pleased and rather amused, peered at him in the starlight. She had rather expected to make him believe whatever she said; but his straightforward reasoning did not make her uneasy. She trusted him; and she felt even more secure in Rand's readiness to keep still when he knew that she was loyally Southern than she would have felt if her safety had depended upon persuading him that there was some doubt about her being a Rebel spy.

Rand frowned, thinking; then inquired skeptically—

"But if the South treated you so bad, why is it you don't want us Yanks to whip 'em?"

"Oh, Rand, you are a queer boy!"

"I ain't. But I'm awful curious about you."

"When shame comes, it is then that you learn who real friends are. And I will tell you this much: I did not get you out of jail just because I thought you were Southern, but because I love your uncle and Judith."

"Then nobody had any business thinking anything wrong about you—not if my family didn't!"

"Rand!" she exclaimed, desperately mocking as tears started into her eyes. "If you don't stop, I shall soon be in love with you, myself. And that would be terrible, wouldn't it?"

"Sho' would," he said soberly. Then, wanting the subject changed, he inquired again, "Why you taking me to General Heckle?"

Laura, only partially truthful, said:

"You know that I owe you and your old Mr. Raze a very great debt. I want to bring you to the favorable notice of those who can help you."

"I'm obliged. But I like Colonel Sherman."

"And I don't!" said Laura, not bitterly.

"Why not?"

"He is really a very fine man, Rand. But not enough like a typical Yankee officer to please me."

"Does he know who you really are?"

"I am not sure. I rather suspect that very likely he does."

"Then wouldn't he tell General Heckle you are not a Canadian lady?"

"Why, of course he would. But you see, I am not trying to deceive General Heckle—"

"No, not at all?"

Laura laughed in amused exasperation, but explained quite seriously:

"He knows I am Southern, Rand. He knows why I left the South and that I am not a Canadian. But I pretend to be so I won't be talked about too much. And, of course, General Heckle knows that General Beauregard believes I am trying to regain the good opinion of all my old Southern friends by giving the Confederates military information; whereas, really, I am merely fooling them and learning their secrets, which I bring back to General Heckle. Now do you understand, Rand?"

"My gosh, no. It's too mixed up fo' me. All I know is that whateveh you bring back to old Heckle ain't worth shucks to what you take down to old Beauregard. You are a Rebel spy. And it puts me in a pickle 'cause I can't and I won't tell anybody. I sho' wish you'd go back South and stay there, where you b'long. And you ought to go!" His earnestness amused her. "You can't tell who might find out, and you know it's terrible to be a spy. I wish you'd go. I don't want to see you get caught. And I'll bet ever'body ain't fooled so much as you think!"

Rand was really talking about the note in his jackboot, but that was as near as he could come to warning her without being false to Sherman.

Laura smiled and meditated. She did not believe that Rand thought she was near real danger; he just wanted to frighten her away from his Army. It was amusing to her, because now she was taking him to General Heckle for special duty merely to get him away from the Army. She knew that Louisiana troops were at Manassas; with them were General Lanister, Rand's father, cousins other than Valentine, and even Judith. It distressed her as something monstrous to think of a boy like Rand going into battle against his own family. She still clung to the woman's vain confidence that Rand could be influenced—twisted about her fingers—somehow; and planned to get him away from the impending battle at Manassas.

THEY rode in silence. There was only the faint jingle of bridles as the horses bobbed their heads to and fro, the sqeak of leather, the *plop-plop of* hoofs on the dusty road.

After considering various things, and wanting to be sure of his attention, she touched his arm with her whip.

"Rand?"

"Yes'm."

"Do you know a man called Captain Silliker? You have no doubt seen him with Colonel Sherman."

"Him? Oh, yes, I've seen 'im. Tall fellow. Why?"

"Watch out for him." The statement was not particularly stressed; just good advice.

"Why?"

"For one thing, Rand," she said quietly, "he was detailed to find out who killed Major Clarky."

" 'Less you or Mrs. Margate tells, he won't eveh learn! Who is he, anyhow?"

"The son of Senator Silliker."

"That don't tell me much."

"My goodness gracious, you don't know of Senator Silliker? Why, Rand, Senator Silliker's mother was a Lanister—a sister to your own grandfather. The Sillikers are among the finest families in Virginia."

Rand, unimpressed, said nothing.

"I should have thought you would have heard of the Sillikers even in Texas!"

"Texas is plumb all right," he said stubbornly. "You just wait till ouah boys from down there hit us Yankees! But if the Sillikers are such a big Southern family, why is he up here? Was his mother Northern, too?"

"Years and years ago he had to leave the Army—the country even—and was disinherited by the Senator for cheating at cards! He has been an adventurer ever since. Became a private in the British army; has been a general in the Greek army. He fought with the Arabs against the French, with the French against the Arabs. Now he is trying to sell his sword to Lincoln. The Yankees don't care anything about his having cheated at cards. But they are afraid of him because he is a Virginian."

"Then he don't believe in the Union?"

"I don't know what he believes or doesn't believe. I merely know that he isn't a gentleman. Cheated at cards!"

"Gosh a'mighty, look what you are doin' to us Yanks! Does that make you not a lady? You are cheating like we was blind."

"I am not a lady," Laura said quietly.

"I am thought to be as far from it as is possible for a Southern woman, Rand." A moment later, softly, almost in an undertone, "Only your uncle and his family, Rand, continue to regard me as a lady."

"Then you sho' are one. W'y don't you tell me what all the fuss over you is about?"

"No, no." Laura shook her head, turning away. "I don't want to."

"Terris said he knew about it, and it wasn't so. Could prove it, so he said. Why don't we make 'im?"

Laura gestured futilely.

"He is boastful and doesn't know what the truth is. He has said the same thing to me at times, but it means nothing. It is something that can't be proved. And it would only make it worse if I tried to convince people of something they know must always remain in doubt. Captain Terris merely talks that way to persuade me to marry him."

"Marry him! You do, and I'll—"

"I feel the same way about it, Rand," she said reassuringly.

Rand groaned.

"I don't think I eveh saw anybody I just so didn't like. And if my uncle was nice to you after the whatever-it-was that happened, why does Terris think you don't like us Lanisters?"

Laura answered with spirit:

"Do you suppose an outlander and cad like Terris could get in close enough contact with a gentleman like your uncle to know his feelings? Valentine, quite innocently, had a great deal to do with the scandal. So, naturally, Terris thinks I must hate Val—and all Lanisters. And here in Washington, when I pretended to hate everything Southern, naturally I could not let any one, and especially not Terris, know that I made an exception of the Lanister family. For reasons of my own, I chose to encourage him to believe I was particularly embittered toward—"

"You know, I think I'd like you a whole lot better if you wasn't so all mixed up with pertendin' to be what you ain't. It's ha'd to tell what's the real you, and what's just foolin' somebody!"

"Oh, Rand, Rand!" she exclaimed, amused. "I never knew any one so downright frank and honest. I wonder, did you ever tell a real out-and-out lie?"

"Onct when I was a little tad I tried some lying. My ma spanked me good. Dad whipped me, too. Then Bill got me out behind the corral and paddled me fo' getting caught. Least, he said that was why. I don't have much luck lying. They's times, like tonight when I talked to Colonel Sherman, that I don't tell eveh'thing. I just didn't say a word about Major Clarky! But keeping quiet about somethin' and telling it crooked makes a diff'ence—big diff'ence!"

NEAR dawn they jogged across Long Bridge and rode into Washington, now in the hushed hour of late night, more like a capital of a dead nation than one vibrantly astir from Maine to California with a kind of jubilant anger, gathering strength to smash the arrogant South. The South, so insolvent and irritating with its pretense to aristocracy and chivalry, its scorn of Northern artisans and money-changers. "On to Richmond!" was as much prophecy as war cry.

The streets were empty. Here and there lights burned in the upstairs windows of some Government building. Perhaps a clerk belatedly worked hard with muster rolls. Perhaps a tall, gaunt man, with a sad face and hands made awkward by much handling of an ax in boyhood, tormented some general's aide with questions, pointing at a map of Virginia. The sleepless Lincoln, as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, wanted to know how wars were made and battles won. There were plenty to tell him; but it was to take three years of disheartening search before he found men who could show him.

Secession was an accomplished fact

when Lincoln was inaugurated. The preceding administration had said the Federal Government had no right or power to coerce seceding States. The general Northern sentiment regretted, but accepted, secession. General Scott spoke of the rebellious States as "erring sisters, let them go in peace!" Horace Greeley, who had more influence than any man before or since his time in an American newspaper, scornfully dismissed them from the Union. Seward, Lincoln's Secretary of State, did not expect war but foretold that the States would get over their excitement and return to the Union at the rate of one a month. Chase, Lincoln's Secretary of the Treasury, had no notion of war and prophesied that the States would themselves discover their mistake.

Historians try to make out that the North was aroused merely because the Confederates dared to fire on the flag. Yet all through the Confederacy, for months before Fort Sumter was fired on, flags had been hauled down from arsenals and forts, spit upon, torn to rags, bits of them worn insolently as boutonnières; and the sluggish North was not angered.

The South contemptuously believed the North would not fight; and had every superficial reason to think that its sympathizers above the Mason and Dixon Line were too numerous and powerful to permit war. So late as January, 1861, the Democratic party in Ohio passed a series of resolutions in the name of the "200,000 Ohio Democrats" opposing attempts to coerce Southern States.

The following day the same Charleston batteries that three months later were to fire on Sumter fired on the *Star of the West* when it came with supplies and reenforcements for Sumter. It flew the Stars and Stripes; but the North was not at all excited over the insult, nor over the fact that the ship was driven from the harbor. Northern merchants and bankers placidly discussed how to adjust themselves most profitably to the division of the Union, which they accepted as merely a new economic problem.

Yet the guns that fired on Sumter roused the North like trumpets of resurrection, perhaps because the defenders of Sumter fought back. The North seemed to rub its eyes in astonishment that it had dozed while the Union was being divided and the flag hauled down and torn into boutonnières.

Lincoln began his study of war and his search for a general who could win battles. It was to be three bitter, disastrous years before he found the simple, shabby, stolid, uncommunicative man who might be—and was—whipped, outgeneraled, defeated time after time, but would never retreat. But in the meantime Lincoln, a patient man, had to put up with such military relics of long-drawn peace as were at hand.

Laura, in the dawn, rode at once to General Heckle's house, pulled her long coat about her and faced the door as Rand made a clatter with the knocker.

A woolly headed negro in white nightshirt peered out sleepily.

"Oh, Lord bress me! It am you, Miss! Come right intew de pahlor. I'll go wake de Jin'el, yas'm."

General Heckle, in a dark purple dressing gown and crocheted slippers too big for his feet, came hurriedly. Nevertheless, it was evident that for all his haste he had paused before a wash bowl and mirror to brush his thin hair carefully. He was a pop-eyed man, full bodied, with a paunch and a pompous manner. At that time there were no pensions for unwounded officers, and no retirement age. They simple ossified on their jobs, and Heckle was an ancient fossil. In all matters of deliberation he cleared his throat before speaking.

He entered the room so hurriedly that he did not notice Rand, who stood unobstrusively at the side of the doorway.

"My dear, dear Laura!" The general thrust out his arms. "I have scarcely been able to take repose, thinking of the peril you risked—a tender woman—

when a battle impends! It has been very distressing to me to have you go into the Confederate camps when our Army had not yet taken to the field. But now the situation is so much more perilous. But tell me, Beauregard quakes in his boots at our formidable array, doesn't he, dear child?"

Laura drew back, indicating that they were not alone.

"Private Lanister," she said.

General Heckle turned quickly, reddened a little and swelled visibly, mantling himself with military authority. Rand did not smile. He really did not feel like smiling. He was not conscious of caring whether or not General Heckle rewarded his pretty emissary with an embrace. He was wondering how such a doddering old dunce could have command of soldiers.

General Heckle cleared his throat, sounding attention.

"You are Private Lanister, eh?"

"Yes'r."

"Southern, eh?"

"Yes'r."

"Related to that miserable old scoundrel, Randolph Lanister of Louisiana?"

Rand's set jaws twitched. The look in his eyes was something like the bright spot cast by a magnifying glass. Laura saw the look and murmured—

"Oh, General, I am so tired."

She seemed suddenly about to faint from exhaustion, and leaned against the purple gown. The attentive general led her to a chair.

"Poor child. Do sit down."

Laura said wearily—

"Please dismiss him so I can tell you what I have learned."

"Yes, yes." He cleared his throat pompously. "Private Lanister, report to General Patterson at Charleston. He will give you the proper instructions. Since you are a Southern youth, it will be easy for you to mingle with General Johnston's men and learn what that old devil is up to. The honor of serving me in this important work falls upon you, Private!"

"As a spy?"

"Certainly."

"I'm no spy," said Rand with a shake of his head.

"But I order you to—"

"I refuse, sir!"

TO BE CONTINUED

The Bowie Knife

By EUGENE STEBBINGS

COLONEL JAMES P. BOWIE, after whom the famous Bowie knife was named, was born a gentleman of the Louisiana aristocracy. At an early age he became a notable figure in the sporting life of the glamorous, before-the-War South as a duelist who, at the drop of a hat. would defend his honor. Soon after attaining his maturity he became one of the most gallant and romantic of those old fire-eaters, who assisted so gloriously in the winning of the great Southwest.

While it is not my intention to write a biography of the famous pioneer, it is impossible to touch upon the early history of the Bowie knife without bringing its sponsor into the picture. The knife, however, was not invented—or designed, if you please—by the man whose name it bears, but by a negro blacksmith working on the plantation

of Razin P. Bowie, the colonel's brother. This colored man was called Manuel; he was of a cult of negro artisans who wrought the beautiful iron balcony railings and grilles which gracefully adorn the quaint old houses still to be seen in and about New Orleans.

While working at his forge one day Manuel came upon a piece of steel that was much to his liking. Perhaps its shape and quality suggested the making of a knife from it. Those were the days of the fast clipper ships—ships with long, slender bows which cleaved the water —keenly. They had brought fame and fortune to the infant American Navy. I believe that Manuel must have seen many of these ships and admired their clean, sheer lines.

Strangely enough, up to that time most knives had had their points fashioned rather blunt and round, much after the fashion of the bluff-bowed old squareriggers. So Manuel made a "clipper" pointed knife. Note, if you will, how closely he followed the design of the clipper ship. I am not the first to note this fact; many a cutlery maker —especially those making pocket knives —has followed the same design and called the blades so fashioned clipper blades, rather than Bowie blades.

Manuel made his knife fifteen inches long in all, its blade taking up nine inches of this length, about one-third of which was point.

As will be told, opinion was divided over this knife. The romantically inclined friends of Bowie admired the knife, claiming that Manuel had fashioned the peculiar point for cutting the throats of deer—that he had designed it for a better hunting knife. The other faction scoffed at this more glamorous inception and bluntly called it a pig-sticker, pointing out that Manuel was a negro slave, not a hunter, and that one share of his duties on the Resin P. Bowie plantation was to butcher hogs. I am a bit afraid that their reasoning was more accurate than elegant. But, no matter, the knife became the most famous of all knives ever designed.

THIS is where the dashing colonel comes into the picture and rescues it from what might have proved a menial destiny. The colonel went up from New Orleans to visit his brother. He saw the Manuel knife and claimed it for his own. Thereafter, his life and the knife became as one. On his return to New Orleans he engaged in a bloody duel, one night at a quadroon ball, and killed his adversary with the Manuel knife.

Now, such a duel and such a killing would have created a great deal of excitement, of itself. It was the manner of the killing which was extraordinary. The Manuel clipper knife had done its work over-well; it had literally disembowled its victim.

The wound was so horrible that it attracted the attention of hundreds of knife-toting gentlemen.

George Wilkins Kendal, at that time editor of the newspaper *Picayune,* was so impressed with the knife's fine qualities that he wrote a long article about it and its deadly work, reproducing a picture of it in his paper. Kendal called it the Bowie knife. His account fanned the flames of the knife's fame. Rival factions debated its merits; its admirers made many practical tests in the heat of those debates. The knife fully justified their trust.

It was crowned king of fighting knives.

Colonel Bowie finally decided that Manuel's knife could be somewhat improved upon. So he took it to a famous cutler of New Orleans named Pedro and ordered that a new and finer knife be fashioned closely after it. Pedro made a knife, lighter, keener, and having a still longer and more slender point. It was the Pedro knife which then became the model for the better Bowies.

The fame of the Bowie knife traveled up the Mississippi River and all its many tributaries. The Missouri took it to the fur land of the mysterious North-

west. From New Orleans it traveled over the Old Spanish Trail, east to the Everglades and West to the wild plains of Texas. It spread like wildfire over all of Dixieland.

Soon there came a time when no Southern gentleman considered himself fully clothed unless he had one or more about his exquisite person.

The high tops of horsemen's boots proved a fine place in which to carry them. The poorer classes, the crackers and the hill-billies, found means of concealing them about their lightly clad bodies. A somewhat smaller Bowie, having a hole drilled through its handle near the butt, became a necessity. These could be tied about one's neck by a cord, the knife dangling down the back under a hickory shirt. At need, one swift and cunning twitch and the knife was out, the cord broken; and a man was a man indeed, ready and willing to fight.

So it was Bowies, Bowies everywhere for years and years. They were teammates of the six-shooter, the Sharps rifle, the Henry, the Winchester. It was more common to tote one six-shooter and a Bowie than two pistols. The "Whittling Deacons" of Nauvoo used them to whittle their sticks in the faces of inquisitive Gentiles.

Kansas bled.

Bowies on the trail to Utah carved history in the raw.

The Santa Fé; the U. P.; the Overland; "Pike's Peak or bust"! Bowies slashed at Bowies.

White men and red men fell and mingled their blood in the dust with gold. Gold, gold, and guns and knives—the winning of a mighty empire.

AS FOR the man who gave his name to the knife, he is one of our heroes; not because he introduced the knife to us, but in his own good right. Bowie fell with Crocket and those other brave defenders of the Alamo. Their bodies were burned on the spot where the post office at San Antonio now stands. The Pedro knife—a trophy highly valued—was carried by the victors to Old Mexico.

The Manuel knife was returned to the plantation from whence it had first come. It also saw much of violence. In 1864 it was lost when Banks marched through Louisiana with his Federal troops and fired the big house of the plantation. But its offspring are nearly as numerous as the sands of the seashore. It is known wherever sheath knives are used. The name Bowie became generic—even the particular style it meant became more and more indefinite until, today, almost any pattern of large sheath knife is often termed a Bowie.

But we, who knew even a little of the old Wild West, will not forget the true Bowie. The West is strewn with their rusting old blades. I've found them buried in the ashes of forgotten towns. I've found them washed from old Boot Hills. I've found them at old Tubtown on the Hump, at lost Pimp City. I've found them where the herds went by—went by and on into oblivion. The West was won as much by silent Bowie knives as by the loud-mouthed Colts.

By GEORGES SURDEZ

Author of "They March From Yesterday"

The BATURU MANDARIN

THE Tonkinese soldiers slid silently through bamboos and thorny brush, handling the long Lebel rifle, further extended by the twenty-two inch steel of the bayonet, with deftness and skill. These yellow men were born for the jungle, the same breed as the elusive enemy; in motion, their short stature and the feminine grace of their bodies assumed a certain virility.

The light of the sun seeping down through the thick foliage became an uncertain, greenish fog; for mist shrouded the forest like the vapory breath of the undergrowth. From right and left shrilled whistle signals, while from the north, in the direction of the Chinese frontier, sounded the muffled notes of a bugle. There were five hundred men carrying guns in this chaos of vegetation, scouring the hills in search of De-Kai-Kinh, notorious border chieftain, and his band of Asiatic pirates. Signals were needed to prevent nervous soldiers from firing into unidentified groups. It was unfortunate that they also served to inform the foes of the location of patrols.

Lieutenant Larcher, in charge of one of the prongs of the human rake scraping the region for raiders, lifted the metal whistle to his lips and blew two strident notes. Behind him halted four Europeans—a corporal and three privates of the French Foreign Legion—who formed his personal guard, and the score of Tirailleurs Tonkinois, the native infantrymen, short, dapper, well muscled chaps, wearing neat khaki and wide, brass-tipped conical hats.

Larcher removed his sun helmet, wiped the cork band with a handkerchief and

mopped his dripping forehead. The heat was intense, the air stifling, smelling of rotting wood and grass, of moist earth and decayed leaves.

"Fool's errand," he murmured.

He was new to the land, but felt that any one should have understood that this search was vain. An entire army corps sent in to comb this region could not obtain results. De-Kai-Kinh's followers, veteran jungle prowlers, could slip at will between the regular detachments without being discovered. It was obvious that this undertaking was a futile gesture, a mere show of activity to placate officials at Hanoi.

Larcher, tall and athletic, was evidently young—twenty-two at the most. His fresh complexion, blond hair and sensitive eyes and mouth made him appear almost a child in contrast with the mature Legionnaires flanking him—hard, experienced fighters whom Captain Colbert had chosen with extraordinary care because he did not trust the youthful, untested lieutenant.

The corporal was swarthy, long-limbed and taciturn; the others were stolid, massive Germans. Years of campaigning in Africa and Asia had wrung all fat from their bodies, all fear from their souls.

When their officer took a step forward, when he hoisted himself over a fallen treetrunk, the four followed him as if actuated by some mechanism, never taking their eyes from him. Their task was less to protect him from death than to prevent the capture and mutilation of his body should he fall. They did not know him. As an individual he was nothing to them; but the gold braid on his sleeves made him a Legion chief, and therefore a sacred charge.

Larcher had not expected a warm greeting in the company, for he had been told that Legionnaires were clannish. And he had been aware that his full name, Raoul Jules Larcher de Fremond, was known. He had the misfortune to be the son of an important politician, and nephew of one of the large European fortunes—both excellent reasons to be placed on probation. But his reception had been almost rude; he had seen at once that Colbert considered him lightly.

"Heard of you," the captain had greeted him when he had reported at the Post of Nam-Phu three days before. "Didn't expect you so soon. Your place is not here. We don't like amateurs for the sort of work we have to do."

The word *amateur* rankled. Larcher had gone through the Military Academy and had been graduated with excellent rating. But as his name and wealth had singled him out while at school, so they seemed to brand him even in Indo-China. Officers dependent on their pay were inclined to think that he was not sincere in his desire to serve—that soldiering was an amusement, an affectation, with him.

"Amateur," Larcher grumbled.

He turned to find the expectant glances of the Legionnaires and expressionless stares of the Tonkinese waiting for his next move. And he grew nervous. He was their chief, and he was on trial. To the white men he was an untried lieutenant—to the natives a minor military mandarin of unknown worth. He shook himself and pulled at the seams of the khaki tunic glued to his back by sweat.

"All right; let's go on."

PROGRESS was resumed. Larcher and the Legionnaires crashed noisily through the brush. The Tonkinese marched without a rustle. They were not so brave as Legionnaires, Larcher had heard. But he saw that they possessed a different courage — an obscure type of nerve which allowed them to reach out to part underbrush, to crawl or stoop in the masses of rotten reeds without hesitation or reluctance.

Their sergeant was old Xu-Hon, who had been born in a jungle camp, the son of a Chinese soldier in the Black Flag cohorts (which had fought the French

invasion) and of a captured woman. Fifteen years of service with Europeans had not dug deeply into his Oriental placidity.

"We find De-Kai-Kinh?" Larcher asked him suddenly.

"We look good." Xu-Hon appeared somewhat shocked by the question. He was a sergeant, a native; Larcher a white mandarin, supposed to know more than he. "Maybe we find him."

The detachment had reached a sort of shallow earthen trough, an old trail slashing through the heart of the jungle. It had apparently been unused for many days, for there were many obstructions. Branches had grown across it as had creepers and lianas. Once Larcher forgot his instructions and tried to part the leaves with his hand.

"Natives first, Lieutenant," the corporal said instantly.

Larcher nodded and made way for one of the Tonkinese, who hacked a path with short, skilled blows of a machete. But he addressed the corporal in a smooth voice—

"Thanks a lot, Parrel."

"Don't mention it, Lieutenant," the corporal answered. He did not lower his eyes when Larcher flushed at the ironic acknowledgment, but explained, "My orders."

"I know." Larcher tried to smile.

These men were kind enough, but burdened by the unusual responsibility placed upon them. Whereas every French chief was thus escorted, Colbert had made it plain that he, Larcher, would be watched with special care. The young man recalled the captain's truculent personality, the small, bronzed, mustached face propped on the big shoulders, with those hard jaws that appeared about to snap.

"Larcher, you are a novice here. So I'll pass over your questions and criticisms of the operation ahead of us. Whether the search of the hills with the forces available seems logical to you doesn't greatly matter. However, you shall have behind you twenty natives, to whom you represent France. The temptation for a man of your years, in your position, with the doubts you have just expressed to me, will be to rush ahead recklessly. Recklessness has no place in the jungle. On the other hand, you might lose your head in an emergency. I yield to your request to be taken along, but I shall place experienced men near you. Consult them and take their advice."

All this had been said because Larcher, uncomprehending, had asked for explanations. He knew, as well as the next man, the strict interpretation of passive obedience. But he had felt that this random foraging in the bush would be so much wasted energy. And he realized now that Corporal Parrel had instructions to act as his guardian.

His sense of irritation grew. Then the whistles sounded again, at a greater distance. Part of the instructions given to detachment chiefs had been to keep in contact with other patrols. Consequently Larcher replied to the signal and was about to bear right, toward the nearest group. But Parrel spoke and suggested that very course.

Larcher shook his head, deliberately left the trail and kept striking straight into the thick of the bush, away from the whistles. Parrel remained silent for a few hundred yards, then protested.

"Better keep in touch, Lieutenant."

"Halt!" Larcher ordered.

He was resolved to settle the question at once. He lighted a cigaret, hooked a thumb in his belt and inquired, holding out his right sleeve:

"You've seen rank stripes before, Corporal? I'm an officer and I command the detachment."

"The captain told me—"

"*I* tell you that you have two days' punishment for arguing. More to come if needed. You can complain to the captain if you like."

Parrel presented arms. The detachment moved on.

Larcher was not wholly at ease. He had reacted to impulse, punished a man

who was trying to extricate himself from conflicting orders—from a position he should never have been asked to handle. Diplomacy would have been wiser. This was a bad start.

SOON it occurred to him that during this brief talk with the Legion corporal he had engaged his personal responsibility to the limit. Had anything happened to his detachment, or any member of it, a minute before he would have been carrying out orders, hence blameless. Now any mishap, the loss of a single man, might be imputed to his decision. The sweat oozing down his cheeks suddenly felt cold.

He felt the weight of full responsibility for the first time in his life, and the burden was heavy. Things were altered. The jungle, which he had been certain was empty of hostile men, now teemed with imaginary beings. This was the first time that Larcher faced the enemy, and he had been presumptuous enough to enforce his own judgment against the instructions of a superior.

A treetrunk with a shadow at its base became a pirate armed with a carbine; a twisted root emerging from the reeds turned into a creeping raider; a shiny pebble became the polished muzzle of a rifle. The young officer imagined his detachment decimated by unseen snipers.

Minutes passed. The jungle grew tensely silent. Larcher strained his ears for the whistles, for human voices, and heard nothing. Nothing save the heavy rustling of a large bird flying through the treetops and the occasional startling crash of an invisible animal fleeing from the unaccustomed activity created by the armed detachment.

The mist had lifted when he ran against an obstacle he had not expected. It seemed at first like an ordinary copse —a natural hedge of bushes—but as he lifted his machete to swing and slash the first branch he stopped short. He noticed that the twigs on that branch had been deftly interwoven with those of another shrub, that he was facing a barrier arranged by human hands.

At the same moment, right and left of him, the native soldiers came to a stop before the bushes. They glanced at the interlaced foliage, testing it gingerly with their hands and examining the knots. Then they stood waiting, without lifting their blades to cut through.

And Larcher knew they had read the signs as he had.

The lieutenant had heard and read of such flexible obstructions created in the jungle from the jungle itself. He recalled that at school a captain returned from Indo-China had lectured on bush fighting and stressed the importance of such things. They could not be discerned from a distance and attracted no attention, yet formed ideal natural fortifications which delayed the approach of the enemy just long enough for the riflemen concealed somewhere behind them to aim at leisure and to be sure of a decisive advantage.

Larcher's duty was plain. This was an indication that De-Kai-Kinh was somewhere near. Having discovered the hiding place of the raiders, orders were for a detachment commander to attack immediately and hinder flight, while the half thousand men available would race toward the detonations from all sides.

But he felt that another swing of his blade, another step forward, would start the engagement. De-Kai-Kinh, according to reports, had between thirty and fifty men with him—enough to slaughter his detachment before help could arrive.

For an intolerable second Larcher envisioned what was coming, heard the crash of carbines, the screams of pain and terror. No one would blame him now; his disobedience had led to success. But it would cost lives—many lives—entrusted to his keeping.

Then, slowly, there crept into his brain the knowledge that he was deceiving himself; that what he dreaded was not the harm that would befall others, but the hurt to his own body. He was

in the lead, a chief, therefore singled out for the first shots. Between his eyes he could feel the glance of a hidden marksman, burning him like a hot iron.

An order, a gesture, a twitching of the hand, and his skull would be pierced.

Death—and it would not be death in action, but an execution. For he did not have a chance to live. The chief would be slain first. He was very young, very young; and while he had known always that he might be called upon to sacrifice himself for his profession, the opportunity, the need, had come too soon!

He seemed to have lost control of his body. His tongue felt hard and thick in his dry mouth; his throat was contracted. He was discovering fear, which he had known only as a word. Sheer, unreasoning, animal terror, that robbed him of will power and courage. The taste of it was on his palate. His nerves were wrenched and twisted by fear.

He was conscious of nothing beyond that burning sensation on his forehead where the bullet would strike; he believed nothing save that his body soon would be stretched out, inert and mangled, on the grass, with the patchwork of sun rays filtering from the rifts in the canopy of leaves overhead to play upon his corpse.

Yet, at the same time, his eyes and ears registered every movement, every sound, every light and every shadow, each tiny rustling of the bush. Xu-Hon's eyes, with pupils dilated, a mingled expression of curiosity and uneasiness drifting to the surface from somewhere in his strange soul, caught his glance. He could see Parrel also, standing near, very calm, unaware that anything was wrong. The corporal could not know, for he had not felt that queer, ominous resistance of the twigs to his weight, and the knots could not be distinguished until sought for.

In the silence, one of the Legionnaires coughed. The noise crashed in the Lieutenant's head like a roar of thunder. Another white man shifted his grip on his rifle, and Larcher heard very clearly the almost imperceptible rasping of the calloused palm on the smooth steel.

Perhaps he felt so alive, his senses were so keen, because this was the last scene his eyes would ever behold, because these were to be the last sounds perceived by his ears. He stood petrified for several seconds longer.

He knew that he was a coward to hesitate. Parrel, a mercenary, would have attacked without delay.

He wondered how long he had stood there, mute, motionless. Not very long, for Parrel exhibited neither impatience nor worry. His mind was at peace. If Larcher fell, he would catch the slumping body and bear it away without attempting to fight, until dropped himself. Larcher envied him and his comrades, men who had accepted servitude, who went through existence acting on the wills of others, as mechanical pianos pound out the notes released by the perforations of a roll.

He made a last effort. He wanted to shout the order to go on. Instead, he found himself turning away slowly, with a prayer that the man across the way, behind the barrier, would understand and accept this tacit surrender.

"All right," he said, "let's go back."

He walked through the detachment to take the lead again. He felt an unbearable sensation of shame as man after man closed behind him, covering his own flesh from harm—a shame that mingled with a savage, primitive elation, a joy that flooded him from feet to skull.

No shot came.

The natives slid through the jungle as before; the Legionnaires panted and swore under their breath. Larcher was not concerned over the white men. But the natives knew that he had failed.

"Feeling sick, Lieutenant?" the corporal asked.

"Why—I—no, no."

"You look sick. Maybe it's jungle fever. Gets some people right away. Feeling kind of cold all over, Lieutenant?"

Larcher looked at him, at the Legionnares, at the native soldiers. White and yellow, he had failed their code. He didn't belong here.

"Kind of cold," he admitted slowly.

LARCHER had recovered his composure when he reached the Post of Nam-Phu with the returning troops at one o'clock in the afternoon. As a man may know he has been stabbed with a very sharp instrument yet not feel the pain immediately, Larcher realized he had a problem before him, but seemed numbed, unaware of its gravity.

He ate lunch in the mess-room with Colbert and the other officers. All were silent, sullen. The captain had been harsh and impatient before the start of the expedition that morning, had offered no explanations. Now he seemed depressed and gloomy. Possibly because he thought that the novice was amused at the vain display of forces in the hills, possibly because he might be blamed by his superiors at the capital. He asked no questions and cut short the vague reports of his subordinates.

"Made a monkey out of himself," one of the younger men whispered to Larcher as they left for their own quarters. "He's stubborn when he has an idea—you'll find that out."

Larcher knew who was to blame. Colbert was not mistaken. One of his men had failed him. At one time, he, Larcher, had had success in his grasp and had relinquished it through fear.

The lieutenant sprawled on his cot. The heat closed in damply. He had failed as completely as any man could, shown pride at the wrong moment, likewise conceit and disobedience; and he had capped it all by proving himself an utter coward. He wondered how much of the prejudice and hostility he had encountered in the army had been due to envy, as he had thought, and how much to flaws in his character sensed by veteran soldiers.

Larcher had cracked under a strain the first time he had been tested. It was a catastrophe, the end of all. There could be no thought of remaining at Nam-Phu. Xu-Hon knew; the native soldiers knew. Perhaps they would not report him to Colbert; but whispering would start, for they would have no faith in him.

A white chief had faced De-Kai-Kinh and had retired without daring to attack. In those brief minutes of hesitation and cowardice Larcher had not merely frustrated the efforts of five hundred men, but he had lowered the prestige of the Legion, of the French—and proportionately increased that of the pirate chieftain.

Even if Colbert and his colleagues never learned, he did not have the right to carry on as if nothing had occurred. He must resign; he must confess his weakness.

And after that was done, leave. Go—where?

He could not pick up life with that admission of failure behind him. He would need to lie too often, to give too many hypocritical explanations for abandoning the service. It had been a custom at the academy to joke about military faults, to crook one's finger near the temple when scolded by a professor for making a wrong answer.

Now, within eighteen months of those carefree days, Larcher in all seriousness took an automatic from its holster. He laid it on the table before him, then wrote his resignation, giving all details. When it was completed he contemplated it, then reread it with astonishment. He had been unable to prevent a certain note of pathos from creeping into his lines.

Others would not understand. He burned the confession, penned a brief note of resignation. Again he was not satisfied. It was not decent to inflict this on Colbert, without letting him know. Courage was needed for this—another type of courage.

"I'll tell him and put it up to him," he decided.

HE LEFT his quarters and walked along the veranda to Colbert's room. To his surprise, the captain was not taking the customary siesta. Larcher saw him seated before the big work-table in his office, consulting papers. He appeared aged, worried, sucking mechanically at an unlighted pipe.

"I need a few words with you, Captain," Larcher said.

"Later, tonight—after dinner," Colbert said, looking up with obvious impatience. Then his gray eyes swept Larcher's face. "Sorry, my lad, come in. It's serious, eh?"

Larcher sank into a chair. He told his story in a low voice.

Colbert heard him out without interruption, nodding from time to time. Then he rose and crossed to the northern window of the room. His feet trod lightly on the tiger skins spread over the bamboo floor.

"Come here, Larcher."

The lieutenant rose and joined him.

As the buildings of the post were constructed on the flank of a tall hill in a series of terraces, the eye could sweep the panorama for miles. Against the dull, overcast sky of midafternoon, which dripped heat like a warmed pewter dome, he distinguished the bulk of an ancient, dilapidated Chinese fortress facing the French fortification—a mass of brownish earthen walls three miles across the border on a knoll dominating the blue-green of the jungle-filled valleys and ravines.

"Our real enemies—the bush and the mandarins in there," he said. "Forget what happened to you this morning and allow me to give you an explanation."

"I can't forget, Captain. Something must be done."

"I'm forty years old," Colbert said slowly. "I've been a soldier twenty years. In your place, nevertheless, I would have felt fear as you did. But experience would have permitted me to beat down the protesting beast within. That's what I meant, in a way, when I called you an amateur. You have not learned that in war rifles miss oftener than they hit. You had as good a chance of being shot between the shoulder blades when you turned as you would have had to be killed rushing forward."

"The fact remains I proved myself a coward. The native soldiers know it." Larcher shrugged miserably. "I was ready to shoot myself awhile ago. Do you advise my resignation?"

"I?" Colbert smiled faintly. "Dumping your problem on me isn't very brave, either."

"True," Larcher admitted.

Instead of exhibiting scorn or pity as Larcher had expected, Colbert was calm and unconcerned. He offered a cigaret to the young man and lighted one himself.

"You alone know what you will do on the next occasion. You fled from death once. You may do it every time—or never do it again. Only the future will tell."

Colbert lifted his shoulders in a movement of disgust.

"You are not the only one who is at a loss. You know something of De-Kai-Kinh, of course? He was a coolie like any other to start with. His village chief designated him for service in the Tirailleurs. He was poor, without influence. Taught how to use a rifle, he got fed up with drilling and deserted. At the start he was a small caliber bandit, such as we have by the dozen on the frontier.

"The government itself built him up into a famous leader, offering that enormous reward for him—ten thousand silver piasters! That swelled his band swiftly—any number of jungle tramps, deserters from our forces and from the various Chinese armies. And he has been growing increasingly bold.

"Those telegrams on the table chide me for neglect of duty. For carelessness, because he comes and goes as he pleases. What can we do? When we press him, he gets over the border into China. The mandarins over there back him secretly, receiving a percentage on

his loot for their trouble. Once over on their side, he is safe; his men go to the towns to carouse a bit. And he usually stays about, within hand's reach, as it were.

"I can't go after him. It would be a violation of neutrality, you understand. China is being watched jealously by the world. We'd have all the nations on our back if some of our troops went over. I had thought of a good scheme. I've an acquaintance here, not a worthy character according to strict standards of behavior, but a man, a bold man—an ex-sergeant of the Legion—who was willing to go across to get him if I provided arms for his men.

"That's what I should explain. You are new, and you asked questions, called attention to certain evident flaws in my plans. Not your fault, but I was sore. Get that?"

"Yes, Captain."

"That search was to put De-Kai-Kinh off his guard, to force him over the border to his usual hiding place—where my fellow, who knows his business, would have plucked him like a daisy. Of course, with a beginner's luck, you ran into his den on this side. But had I known you would, I would have ordered you to act as you did, so sure was I that by tonight he would be where we could get him without loss of life. However, there's been a leak. Read this."

He handed Larcher a dispatch from Hanoi, instructing the military commander at Nam-Phu to call in all rifles issued to militia and village partisans for inspection by an ordnance officer due very soon.

"Those were the guns I counted on distributing to the independent raiders for tonight's job. That's merely a delicate fashion of making me know that my plan has been guessed and is disapproved. The officer left in charge here received a visit from the civil administrator while we were gone and probably told him of your objections, which made the chap think. He's scared to death of responsibility and so felt he had to inform Hanoi."

A servant stepped in to announce a visitor, and Larcher rose to leave. But Colbert motioned for him to keep his seat.

"That's the man who was to do the trick. He'll be disappointed. But better wait and meet him. He's a most curious fellow."

VALESKO, a pensioned sergeant of Legion, appeared at the heels of the servant. He was very tall and rangy. He wore wrinkled khaki garments, and a battered sun helmet on which a light spot indicated the removal of a military badge. His graying mustache was long, drooping over a hard mouth. His cheeks were sunken and grooved. He was nearly fifty, but appeared over sixty. His eyes were peculiar—a greenish blue—and the dilated pupils appeared to float in the bilious whites.

He acknowledged the introduction to Larcher with a casual nod.

"Heard of you—"

He sprawled in the nearest easy chair and leisurely filled an old pipe. The fingernails of his wiry hands were broken and dirty. His throat protruded above a knotted black kerchief. There was something in him of the soldier, the adventurer, the tramp and the apache.

"The whole thing's off, Valesko," Colbert announced.

He offered the telegram. The other scanned it and shrugged.

"Too bad. But for all they know, those chaps at Hanoi may have saved my hide. De-Kai-Kinh is a pirate and all that, but he isn't a bad fellow. Last time I tried to get him, I found nothing when I reached the appointed place except the body of my informer—and a note telling me that on the next occation I meddled with his business, he'd catch me and treat me in the same way."

Valesko smiled grimly.

"Ever see a man skinned alive, young fellow?"

"No," Larcher admitted.

"I have," the ex-Legionnaire stated. "Quite a sight, even when you're seasoned by ten years of Tonkin. You slit the skin from forehead to neck over the skull, grab the hair on either side and pull. The hide strips off like a banana peel. It's a good man who remains conscious until it's pulled down as far as his ears."

Valesko gestured helplessly, and Larcher believed him filled with reminiscent horror until his next words showed that his thoughts had changed utterly.

"That's the trouble with the French government—can't employ competent men for given jobs. Here am I, a private citizen, willing to raid into China at my own risk and peril, supplying my own men; and I can't even get hold of a couple of dozen old Gras rifles and a few hundred cartridges."

"Afraid of complications," Colbert said.

"Sure—although the authorities across the way are doing that very thing. Believe me, the military mandarins see to it that De-Kai-Kinh and his lads are properly equipped!"

Larcher stared at Valesko with a sensation of wonder. He had known such characters existed, but it was the first time he had met one of them in the flesh. Here was a man who would actually have sought out De-Kai-Kinh on alien territory, with a mere handful of poorly armed irregulars, on sketchy, uncertain information! Larcher's admiration was intense.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "they might help a man willing to go into it for the sport of the stunt!"

His enthusiasm brought an unexpected result. Colbert and Valesko looked at each other, both laughing gently. His expression of surprise was so genuine that it was some time before the captain could explain.

"There's a ten thousand piaster reward on De-Kai-Kinh," he then reminded Larcher. "That's what Valesko's after. It is all business with him—his trade. That and hunting tigers—" Colbert winked at the old chap—"and a number of other undertakings of which I am presumed to know nothing."

"I wouldn't contradict you, Captain," Valesko agreed. He puffed at his pipe, took a long swallow of brandy. "Of course, the main obstacle is that I am short of money. With a few thousand francs I could raise armed men myself. I could show a profit at the end, after paying off my partisans."

"Couldn't the men chance cutting in on the profits?" Larcher suggested.

"In that case—" Valesko shrugged—"if they wished to speculate, they'd take to the jungle and be raiders themselves. But although rifled weapons are forbidden private individuals around here, there are plenty of resolute guys with modern carbines hidden somewhere in their huts, willing to chance one expedition if payment is guaranteed in advance. For their families, you understand—or rather for the sons who will go through the required ritual after their death."

"Suppose you had the money," Larcher insisted, "how long would it take to gather the men for the job?"

"I could get a solid crew together in four hours."

"Then go ahead," Larcher said impulsively. He brought out his wallet and produced a sheaf of banknotes. "I'll finance the undertaking. Is there enough here? I can cable Hanoi for more."

Valesko had counted quickly.

"More than enough. I'll have to change it into metal money at the Chinese trader's in the village. Those jungle fellows don't like bills. Aside from a refund, what share do you want?"

"No refund, no cut," Larcher said quickly. "I'm backing you on one condition—"

"What?"

"That you take me along."

"Impossible," Colbert and Valesko said at the same time.

The captain explained:

"You are an officer, remember. You couldn't expect official help from the

consuls if you were caught as an independent raider. It would lead to investigation—trouble—"

"You know I have an excellent reason to chance it," Larcher declared to his chief. "I'll write my resignation, seal it—and, in case something goes wrong, the government will be covered and can disavow me."

The captain frowned.

"Do you understand what capture would mean, Larcher?"

"Torture." The lieutenant nodded. "Valesko has told me enough for me to realize it might not be pleasant for awhile."

"We may run headlong into a trap, into De-Kai-Kinh's whole band," Valesko pointed out. "There's been a leak to the government; there may have been one to him."

Larcher gestured excitedly and pointed out:

"That makes our chances all the better. If he was tipped off to your plans, he also was tipped off that they have met official refusal, and he will be at ease. If you work fast, there may be no time for his spies to warn him of this new development."

"You're pretty young to die," Valesko said soberly.

"I thought so myself awhile ago," Larcher admitted with a faint smile. "But I have reasons to go into a thing like this. It's worth the money to me. This morning, I—"

"Lieutenant Larcher has reasons, as he says," Colbert interrupted with a warning glance.

Valesko looked slowly from one officer to the other, saw they were in earnest. He nodded and rose.

"Agreed. Change into civilian clothes. Meet me down at the village two hours after dark."

He hesitated a moment, then said—

"It may not be healthy in China; you know that?"

Larcher smiled.

"I'm not planning to go there for my health."

THE night was silent. Far off the barking roar of a prowling tiger resounded at intervals. Long since the moon had slipped below the tree crests. Dawn was but an hour away.

"We're almost there," Valesko said in a natural voice.

From the start Larcher had been surprised at the absence of caution. When he had reached the village, Valesko had had his men assembled, had declared that each one possessed an excellent gun and sufficient ammunition. The majority of his recruits came from neighboring villages, with a sprinkling of wanderers who had joined through a liking for adventure as well as a chance of profit.

Almost without exception they were of the Thos race—sturdy, stocky little fellows, garbed in blue turbans and garments of the same color. The march through the jungle, the crossing of the frontier, had not been furtive.

"Not afraid some one will hear you?" Larcher wondered.

"No. De-Kai-Kinh, being on good terms with the Chinese officials, feels safe where he is. It's an old village, abandoned long ago by those who built it. He knows that there are several tiger hunting parties about, with Europeans, two of them with special permission of the mandarin nearest here. Either he'll mistake us for one of them and won't pay any attention to our noise, or he knows we are coming in advance. So that, either way, silence and caution would be useless until the very end."

"Sounds reasonable," Larcher granted.

"On the other side of the border, where he is always watching for our patrols, we'll have to be careful. But he's not suspicious here." Valesko looked up at the stars glittering between the thick foliage of the branches overhead. "We stay right here until dawn. If he gets out of his hut and into the jungle, we'll need light to locate him."

He lighted a match for their cigarets and, in the brief glow, Larcher saw his

confident grin, discerned the steady eyes, the flat, yellow faces and muscular necks of his followers. There was the gleam of steel. The sense of danger, of freedom and power, was incomparably stronger, more exhilarating than when he had led a military detachment.

He took stock of his impressions. Vague fear stirred in him, and he shared the speculation that agitated them all. Had De-Kai-Kinh been warned? Would they be greeted by a salvo of carbines when they rushed his hiding place? Larcher lived in imagination, as he had the preceding morning, the short minute of contact. What would happen? The capture of the raider, or the wiping out of the detachment seeking him?

The stakes were well defined: victory or death in torture.

But this time he knew that he had found himself, that he could meet any emergency. He had no responsibility, no prestige to uphold. He was an irregular, a free man.

"Ever see De-Kai-Kinh?" he asked.

"No. But Nong-Toh, my second, used to belong to his band. Several of the others have encountered him in the forest and can identify him."

"Well known, yet hard to catch, eh?"

"That's not extraordinary. De-Kai-Kinh doesn't have to guess, but the French have to. He is a native and has spies everywhere. Any time pursuers close in, he comes into China. Captain Colbert nearly went mad until he thought of me. He didn't like the idea too much, for he is a soldier and likes things done regular. But this was the only sure method."

"I know Colbert likes you."

"He does. But he doesn't approve of me." Valesko laughed. "According to him, I should get an honest position, supervisor in a timber cutting or at the mines of the delta. Instead, when the government turned down my application for a job with the Department of Streams and Forests, I struck out on my own. Odd tasks—some opium smuggling, taking bunches of women into China on the return trips. Plenty of money in that. But I drink and gamble, as there's no use saving for an old age I'm not likely to enjoy. After the first time most of it gets to be dull routine. This kind of thing is the cream."

Valesko went on talking, relating anecdotes, for a long time; then he sniffed the air.

"Dawn's near. We'd better start. You go with Nong-Toh when he tells you. I go ahead now."

He vanished. Larcher heard crackling in the bushes, then all was still. He stood in the darkness, his heart pounding, for several minutes. Then he dimly distinguished the outlines of the branches against the lightening sky.

A hand touched his arm.

"Come. Touch my back always—"

Larcher obeyed. He knew that Valesko had taken but half the troop, that there must be ten men within a few feet of him, encumbered with rifles, knives and cartridge pouches. But he could hear no footfalls save his own.

From time to time his extended hand would miss the muscular shoulder of his guide, but sure fingers would reach out of the night to guide him to the right path again. After some minutes silhouettes emerged from the darkness—uncertain, distorted figures moving as in a thick fog—the Thos.

DAWN had come. The earth exhaled a strong odor; the bushes were damp. Larcher's boot soles sank in the muddy trail. In the new light, Nong-Toh, five feet two inches, with an enormous chest and superbly developed arms, grinned at him.

"Soon." He lifted his hand and pointed ahead.

Larcher saw nothing save the thick jungle; but he knew that his eyes were blind, his ears deaf, compared to those of this amazing fellow. His excitement had died down, leaving him with a sort of chilly resolution.

It was hard to believe he was

Larcher, on an unauthorized raid into a neutral country. Three months before he had been in France; a month ago on the way from Saigon to Haiphong by sea, surrounded by passengers in evening dress, with music playing. Somewhere, somehow, Larcher had become separated from that pale phantom which had been himself. Whatever occurred, he felt, he would behave like a white man.

Nong-Toh touched his arm and hissed for him to be still. Then he plunged into the bush, to return within three minutes, wiping his blade with a fistful of grass.

"They no know; everything go good. Come on."

Larcher fought down a feeling of weakness at his middle. While he had waited, a killing had taken place within a few yards from where he stood. He could picture the event: the quick, silent crawling of Nong-Toh upon another yellow man just like himself, a former comrade; the lightning leap, the sweep of the blade.

Yes, he had been a different man, living in another world. Imitating the others, he crouched low. Without being aware that he had reached for it, he felt the butt of the automatic pistol in his right hand. He cast a glance at the barrel, gleaming, comforting. His thumb released the safety-catch. His temples felt as if compressed in a ring of steel. His mouth was dry.

The trail ended suddenly, opening on a clearing overgrown with tall reeds. On the edge of the forest opposite him he saw a half dozen low dwellings, small shacks, native *canhas* similar to those he had seen everywhere since entering the Upper Tonkin. Perhaps these were more dilapidated than others. But some one lived in them. Blue smoke lifted straight from the roof of one of them, slowly merging with the cloudy gray sky. De-Kai-Kinh's morning rice was on the fire.

Nong-Toh peered back at him a last time, his teeth bared. Then he gathered himself, unleashing his bunched body like a spring, and sped across the clearing. Larcher raced behind him. The others followed. The light bamboo door was broken down immediately. But, even as it yielded, the fire which had cast a red glow over the interior vanished, extinguished with startling speed at the first hint of peril.

The hut was dark. Figures leaped about, collided, milled. At first there were no shouts—nothing but the panting breaths and grunts of struggling men. Then the Thos brought by Valesko called out to identify each other.

A reek of burning cloth and of steaming rice filled the place. One of the Thos lifted the moist blanket thrown on the coals. The wood burned brightly.

Larcher swept the room with a glance and noted the faces he had seen the preceding evening when the counter-raiders had gathered. There was no stranger standing; but two huddled shapes were on the floor, inert bundles of dark blue clothing. Hands grasped them, turning the faces upward. Nong-Toh came nearer, scanned the features.

"De-Kai-Kinh not here," he said.

"Escaped?"

"Maybe no. M'sieu V'lesko outside."

The native was unhurried, matter-of-fact. He had done all he could; his pay was guaranteed. He refused to waste emotion on regrets that might prove premature. One of his men righted the kettle, and the Thos were soon piling rice into the bowls left by the enemy.

"I stood by the door," Larcher said, having sought for a window in vain. "How did they get out?"

Nong-Toh went to a row of crudely manufactured cots along the rear wall, mere platforms of bamboo propped a few inches from the floor. He indicated the space beneath, and Larcher, having knelt, reached out with his rifle to prod the wall. A light bamboo partition swung outward, revealing a narrow vent in the mud-bricks.

"Ready all time," he explained. "Boss knows."

Scattered detonations very soon cracked outside. The Thos looked up, their eyes shining. With unerring instinct Valesko had foreseen the pirate's line of retreat. Larcher grinned and strolled out, leaving the Thos at their meal.

In the grass grown clearing, in the sunlight, Larcher grew uneasy. Something caused him to look up at the roof of one of the huts. And he saw the head of a man over the peak of that roof, sighting along the glittering barrel of a carbine. He knew at once that this was De-Kai-Kinh, who had suspected that his hiding place was surrounded and had climbed up instead of rushing headlong into the forest.

As he had not fired upon discovery, Larcher understood the silent bargain: If the white man did not shout for the Thos, if he turned and reentered the hut to inform his men, De-Kai-Kinh would have time to slip into the brush and take another chance. And the lieutenant knew that the pirate had good reason to believe he would do this. It would not be the first time!

According to legend, De-Kai-Kinh never missed. But Colbert had said that, even when afraid, it was best to take the braver course, safer. And Larcher remembered taking his own gun, being ready to shoot himself. Fate, perhaps, had brought him here to atone. It does not take long for superstition to gain hold in the jungle.

Erect, calm, Larcher swung up his pistol. The shots rang out. The sun helmet was knocked from his head, but De-Kai-Kinh had slid out of sight. Larcher ran around the corner of the hut, joined by the Thos.

THEY found a very short, very slight yellow man, garbed in khaki, probably the uniform of a slain militiaman. Larcher stared at him. There was nothing fierce, nothing of the leader, in De-Kai-Kinh's appearance. Yet here was the man who had kept the entire military forces of the Nam-Phu district on edge for over six years. The lieutenant noted that one of his arms hung limply, that the sleeve was wringing wet with blood.

"I better dress that for him," he suggested.

"What's the use?" Valesko had appeared.

He paid no compliments and seemed in a great hurry. He indicated Nong-Toh, honing a broad blade whose back was almost as thick as that of an ax. Another man was plaiting something out of tough grass.

"No need to make him suffer unnecessarily."

"You mean to execute him without trial?"

"If we keep him alive his men will try to rescue him before we get to the border. Or the Chinese may claim him." Valesko showed impatience for the first time. "Don't make me laugh, young man. What trial would he have given us? He understands. Don't you, *mon vieux?*"

"It is proper," the raider replied.

He looked about him with a show of fear, at the knife, at the rapidly woven crate that would hold his head. He called Nong-Toh, whom he recognized among his captors, and spoke to him in dialect.

"Promising him a reward if he will inform his people, his sons, as to where to find his body, where to claim his head." Valesko shrugged. "He knows that it was Nong-Toh who betrayed him. But, time being short, he wastes no time in cursing him for something that can't be mended. They know a lot, these people. *Maoullen!*" he snapped. "Be quick!"

De-Kai-Kinh murmured an apology for the delay and unwound his turban. Then one of the bystanders fastened his hands behind his back with a rope, not that the prisoner would try to flee, but the slightest gesture might cause a

bad blow. The raider knelt. Evidently he had foreseen this finish, for he went through every movement as if he had rehearsed, without unseemly emotion, without loss of dignity.

Nong-Toh tested the edge of his blade on his thumb. Then he adjusted De-Kai-Kinh's head to his liking, lifting the hair up from the nape of the neck with great care. Satisfied, he stepped back and lifted the knife. His whole body tensed. His legs were propped solidly, wide apart. There was a bright whirling of steel against the gray light, a perceptible rush of air—and a thud.

And while Nong-Toh's assistant took charge of the precious head, worth ten thousand piasters in the open market, the others searched the huts for concealed loot, unburied chests and cloth-covered baskets.

THE end of De-Kai-Kinh could not escape attention, and was reported in the Indo-Chinese newspapers. There were indications that something out of the ordinary had taken place. Explanations were sought. The French authorities stated that the reward had been paid to Valesko, a private citizen settled near Nam-Phu.

Very soon an accredited version was assembled from bits of information gleaned here and there by the curious. It was said that Lieutenant Larcher had organized a large hunting party to kill his first tiger and had hired Valesko as his guide. By chance, this expedition had encountered the De-Kai-Kinh, almost alone, within a few hundred meters of the border. Recognized by a native beater, Nong-Toh, the raider had refused to surrender, upon which the hunters had fired and slain him.

"The natives know the truth," Larcher said. "But does a stroke of luck make up for—"

Colbert laughed.

"One of the papers attributes the success of the trip to your presence, evoking amateur's luck. There must be something in it. Because, being naturally somewhat worried about what the native soldiers thought of you, I questioned the old sergeant, Xu-Hon, as discreetly as I could. I was amazed, after what you had told me, to hear him say that you were not only a real mandarin, but a *baturu* mandarin, which means a very wise one."

"How did he come to that conclusion?" Larcher broke in.

"Because of the incident at the barrier," Colbert said. "Xu-Hon states that although you are a young man and a novice out here, you took the time to examine the knots and twigs to see that they had been made months ago —that no one could have passed that way in half a year. A clumsy chief, he said, would have neglected such signs and ordered his men to hack through—but you understood, it seems!"

Old Hutch and THE GOLD STANDARD

By EDMUND S. WHITMAN

WHERE Old Hutch made his mistake was in leaving that travel magazine open at the article he was reading. We all watched his moves like hawks anyway; it was our only chance of being prepared to withstand his drives on our pocketbooks. So when he jumped up from his desk and tore out of the room as if somebody had wired his chair with 110 volts, naturally our curiosity was aroused.

"When that old buzzard moves like that, there's the odor of some unusually rotten meat tickling his nostrils."

"Check," confirmed the office cynic. "Ordinarily he never moves like that—even when he's only a couple of jumps ahead of the village constable. Let's investigate."

It was only an article about an island off Nicaragua; Admiral Island it was called, because the great navigator once

stopped there on his second voyage. There was a map showing its proximity to the Atlantic mouth of the old Nicaraguan Canal which was going strong during the California gold rush of '49.

"Who'd'a' thought that old bloodhound would dip his snout in ancient history?" one of the boys grumbled.

"I *still* maintain there's something rotten," the cynic cut in.

"Personally I wouldn't put it past Hutch to be planning some way of selling that canal to some sucker—"

"Wait a minute! Just a minute! Listen fellows—here it is!" One of the men looked up from the article, eyes popping.

"It says the place is inhabited by an English speaking tribe who migrated to Admiral Island from the Bay Islands of Honduras some time after the French and English War—"

"Thrilling!"

"Shut up! Let him read."

"Gush on then—but get to the point."

"Well, not long ago this tribe located a sunken ship which had been lost in a storm back during the gold rush days. Ten thousand dollars in gold was recovered."

"Ah!"

"That begins to sound like something our Old Hutch might read with interest."

The reader dipped into the article again. This time he came up whistling as we crowded around, grabbing at the magazine.

"Hey! Get this! It tells how the gold was divided up among the inhabitants of the island since they all had a hand in the salvage work. But, little by little, the Chief of the island began to corner the gold. It seems he hauled ashore a keg of nails—an unknown quantity on the island—you can see they all live in thatch houses by the picture—and so he finally got control of the gold, issuing nails in its place! Beat that one! And they've been using nails as a basis of exchange ever since, the Chief holding the gold to back it up!"

"I've heard of shells and wampum—yes, even rum—but nails as a medium of exchange, that whips me!"

"It goes on to say that the Chief is heap smart guy. Every so often some chiseler hears about his economic system and tries to smuggle in a batch of nails. But nobody with anything even remotely resembling a nail can land."

"That doesn't sound like anything Hutch would dip into," the cynic commented. "Give the old buzzard his due; that's small pickin's for a bird of his plumage."

"I am desolated with gratitude."

It was the old maestro's drawl. We all turned. There was Old Hutch, debonair in a racetrack plaid suit, sharply pressed as the prow of a Coast Guard cutter.

"I am flattered, indeed, that you lugs take such a passionate interest in my research into quaint tribal customs."

"The big Nail-and-Pinhead man from the tropics!" sneered one of the boys.

"Tsk! Tsk!" Hutch remonstrated mildly.

"I suppose you'll try to run through a consignment of thumbtacks and put them out as small change."

"Why not take down a cargo of hammers and sell 'em as savings banks—the idea being to drive the nails into the family coconut tree so firmly they can't be yanked out."

Hutch buffed his nails on his sleeve. His hazel eyes surveyed the last speaker with tolerance.

"Not a mature suggestion," he finally decided. "I think I can do better." He carefully adjusted his silk handkerchief. "Yes. Yes. If the flotsam and jetsam will kindly wash off to the next desk I'll sit down and arrange for my passage."

ADMIRAL ISLAND was a thing of beauty and a joy for whatever length of time a man could get off the wallowing launch which comprised the only means of daily communication to and from the Central American mainland.

A survey of this launch at the moment the island was first visible from her greasy deck revealed the presence of the crew, one telescope-type satchel, one portable typewriter, several gross cockroaches—and Old Hutch!

"Seaworthy craft you have here," Hutch volunteered in a thin voice, now that the worst of the journey was over and his objective was in view. He even made sporadic efforts to thumb a semblance of a crease in the tropical worsted suit he had been forced to sleep in. "Little, you know, and smelly—and, of course, indescribably filthy — but seaworthy."

The *capitán,* a gallant Nicaraguan soul, spoke no English, and even his Spanish was questionable. He had no idea what this sandy-haired giant from the North was saying, but the voice was pleasantly modulated. He therefore nodded amiably.

"*Gracias.* And *your* family, how is it?" he responded in Spanish.

"I'll take coffee," Hutch replied earnestly. "That is, if you have anything deserving of the name. Only, pul-leaze, no more bilge water."

"I am happy," the skipper rejoined, beaming. "And your aunt, how is she?"

"If by any chance you are asking after the health of my relatives, as I gather you are, by the occasional familiar word which drops like a jewel from your lips, I am glad to tell you that even the most rheumatic of them is better off than I. And why shouldn't they be? They aren't being bopped around the scuppers of a greasy peanut husk the way I am."

"Oh, many thanks," the skipper replied. "I am honored."

"Think nothing of it," Hutch came back generously.

Yes, yes, he was feeling more expansive at last. He could afford to fraternize with mankind once more. He was going to live. The Caribbean was going to give him back to civilization again after all . . .

The launch drummed into a lovely crescent harbor, rimmed by coconut trees, and rubbed ingratiatingly against a rickety dock. Hutch clambered out at once, and the captain assembled his baggage and placed it on the dock.

"Who are you?"

The white man turned from his farewell with the crew to find himself squarely faced by a squat, weather-beaten man in a shapeless linen suit. Hutch couldn't move backward without tumbling off the pier. He could not move to either side with anything approaching dignity as he was surrounded by baggage and gasoline tins. He could not move forward because the little man had his stomach, a large and aggressive stomach, thrust out to block the way.

"And, in the same tone of voice, but without the gross protrusion of the abdomen, who are you?"

"Chief Amok," was the reply, accompanied by a further incredible swelling of the stomach. "Potentate and Dictator of Admiral Island. Strangers not welcome."

Hutch melted like lard in a skillet.

"Your Majesty—" this in his most reverential voice.

"Call me Chief—and goodby."

"Chief. Let there be no talk of goodbys. I come as a minister of good will without portfolio. I come to Admiral Island to pay the respects of the Brain Trust of Washington."

"Where are the nails?" the Chief interrupted wearily.

"Oh, now, Chief. I bring gifts, greetings and ideas—but no nails. Tsk-tsk. Hardly worthy of an Amok."

"Your baggage and personal effects?"

The squat one was all business. A tough nut to crack. Hutch could tell that at a glance.

"Right here. Nothing but a typewriter and a suitcase. Within the suitcase is nothing but—" he unstrapped it as he spoke.

The little man rudely butted him aside and ran groping fingers greedily through the bag.

"Kindly do not muss the shirts." Hutch was aggrieved. "After all, a man's

personal things should be inviolable. Socks, now; if you must play around with something, mess with them. Or that robe." He kept up a running fire of conversation, anything to keep the investigator from getting too curious about the blank certificate pads in the bottom of the case.

"This thing—" Amok flung back the clothing in the bag and wheeled on the typewriter case. "What does it do?"

"Why, it writes. Mechanically. Letters. Like these." He dug several typewritten letters from his pocket. "Haven't you ever seen one?"

Amok shook his head.

"I don't write letters. I don't have to. What use is the machine to me?"

Hutch laughed. The supreme impudence of the cocky little devil! Appraising a stranger's belongings in the light of their possible usefulness to him!

"Maybe a lot. It all depends. Take this island of yours, for example. If it can produce anything in the way of quaint tribal customs or scenic beauty to compare with this rare old belly-pushing Southern hospitality of yours, it might be a good machine to use to lure rich tourists down to spend and spend and spend—"

Hutch leered as he spoke and jingled the coins in his pockets.

The sharp little eyes studied the speaker. The large intellectual ears quivered at the metallic jingle.

"Hmph!" he said, pushing the machine aside. "Let's examine your personal effects."

A wad of banknotes, a mess of small change and two ten-dollar gold pieces were exhumed. Old Hutch had brought along the gold, thinking it might be useful to introduce a subject in which he was vitally interested.

A pair of nimble fingers snapped the gold coins out of his palm like a hen pecking corn off the barn floor.

"Contraband!" adjudicated the Chief. "I am customs inspector here, you know," he explained.

"That ain't all," Hutch whined. "You seem to be county tax collector and the police department to boot! Gimme back my lucky pieces."

"You will be staying with me while you're here," the Chief said significantly.

"Oh!" Hutch's voice revealed his relief. "Why, that's nice of you, but—"

"It's all right," the Chief put in. "Spare your embarrassment. You insist upon paying. That's all right. Three dollars a day—in advance." He whisked three bills out of Hutch's roll. "And now, my friend, come with me to my house and show me how to work my new machine!"

Whew! Speak of fast workers! Hutch hadn't meant to give him either the gold or the typewriter. What he had had in mind for the predatory old weasel was a combination aluminum can-and-bottle-opener with a strictly non-operating compass set in the handle. That was what he had meant when he mentioned being a bearer of gifts. Now that he had been so royally shaken down he could hardly attempt to reclaim any of his seized possessions; in all probability he would simply have to continue to put out whatever the Chief might fancy.

HUTCH surveyed the village of thatch huts and ruefully regarded the fast-disappearing launch. He was stuck!

"How about some of your lads lugging my satchel?" he whined. "What little you have left me happens to weigh the most." His voice was freighted with sarcasm. But he didn't say that should the Chief purloin the contents of that bag, then he would be ruined! "Besides, I'm too light for heavy work and too heavy for light work."

Amok clapped his hands. Several hungry looking natives padded out on the dock.

"Fetch up that luggage," Amok ordered them. He turned to his guest. "They all owe me money. I am master here. I own both the stores. The harder they work the hungrier they get and

the more they eat. This increases their indebtedness. I pay them in nails. Thousands of nails I have circulated, securing them by gold."

Hutch nodded.

"I would have judged that Admiral Island was on the gold standard by the casual way you snapped up my ducats," Hutch rejoined.

The Chief beamed. You couldn't insult him.

"Too bad, too bad," Hutch ruminated. "Mmmm. Too bad really."

"What's too bad? What's wrong with the gold standard, anyway?"

"Too bad," Hutch murmured.

Then he started to hum as maddeningly as possible. He became interested in flora and fauna. He was in no hurry to continue the argument.

Amok kept hurrying him along toward the only two-story house in the village. All the way he kept firing questions—nervous, apprehensive questions.

"Not sure of himself, this badger," Hutch comforted himself as he ducked his head to enter the thatched door of the house. "Probably nourishing an inferiority complex. Have to find out."

He turned to his host.

"Not a bad little dump," he said patronizingly. "Quaint, really. Not a nail in the premises. Hmmm. Even the floors are earth so you don't have to nail down planks. Thrifty of you. And ingenious."

They were in the main room now—a combination dining and living room. Rough furniture was set about and, in the corner, a what-not heavy with eggshell china.

"Where do I nestle in the hay?" Hutch inquired.

"What's wrong with the gold standard?" retorted the bristling Chief.

"Tssk!" Hutch said. "Why, it's old as the mustache cup. Maybe you have one in your cabinet?" He flung a thumb in the direction of the what-not. "Progressive countries have been off the gold standard for years. Like weaving your own jeans. But why fuss about it? You wouldn't be interested."

He devoted himself to a further study of the house.

"Hey!" he exclaimed, indicating a notched, polished post which protruded up through the cross-beams and thatch, and on to the gable of the house. "What is this—a fire-house?"

The bag boy climbed up like a chimp ascending a coconut tree.

"No stairs," Amok said arrogantly. "It would take nails." He rubbed his hands. "Hundreds of them."

Hutch shook his head sadly.

"Small wonder your island is still on the gold standard."

He kept shaking his head as he moved casually about the room. Finally he stopped before the what-not.

"A couple of nice pieces you've got there," he conceded. "At least there's *some* outward manifestation of civilization on this island."

Amok bounced over. There was a queer light in his eye.

"So you like them? Which ones?"

Hutch pointed to three beautiful examples of fine china—a pitcher, a plate and a platter.

"But don't bother to get them out," he said.

"Oh, yes, I will," the bellicose Chief replied. "I'll get them out if I want to. And I want to, all right!"

Furiously he snatched them out and crashed them to the floor. Then he stamped on them.

"Now I burn the double-breasted suit I bought from Chicago by mail catalogue—the chocolate colored one with peg-top trousers—and then, with nothing else civilized for you to talk about, maybe you'll tell me why we should go off the gold standard!"

Hutch blinked reprovingly.

"Do you mean to say you didn't get two pairs of pants with that suit? Come, come, my friend—don't hold out on me."

Yes, the Chief had an inferiority complex all right—a big, green one with knobs on it!

CHIEF AMOK ruled the island with an iron hand and a weather eye on the financial situation. Hutch soon discovered that. Didn't his host continue to exact three dollars a day for room and board?

And what board! Coconuts, bananas and beans. Bananas and coconuts. Bananas. Coconuts. Beans!

"I daresay we'll have coconuts for lunch today," Hutch kidded.

"Right," Amok replied. "I believe in patronizing local industry."

"I love 'em," his guest said. "Dote on 'em."

The Chief nodded grimly, as much as to say that he might just as well, because that was what he was going to get.

"Nuts!" Hutch added *soto voce*.

"What?"

"Coconuts," Hutch explained. "Or to you, just plain nuts!"

He put everything he had in it. But the chief mistook passion for enthusiasm. He invited Hutch to accompany him on his round of inspection through the island's plantations.

The hillside behind the village was dotted with pretty farms. It was obvious, even in one tour of inspection, that the people, while poor, were not in need. Money—be it gold, silver, nails or seashells—was not the vital thing. There were fish and fruit enough for all.

"What did you use for money over here before the nails?" Hutch probed the still ruffled Amok.

"A little silver," he grumbled. "Nothing much. We used to barter our products for clothing and canned goods with people on the mainland. We still do—and my stores collect whatever money gets into circulation over here."

They stopped at the jail for a moment while Amok pointed out three miserable natives chained to a slowly revolving corn grinder.

"Murderers?" Hutch asked.

The Chief shook his head.

"No. Caught them last week prying rusty nails off a beer crate which washed ashore. As if I wouldn't be able to spot counterfeit nails! Ugh!"

"How much time did they get?"

"Ten years," the Chief said blandly.

"How much will you take to free them?"

Amok turned shoebutton eyes on the speaker. Hutch could read his thoughts. He didn't know how much he could ask for with impunity.

Hutch stripped a ten-dollar bill off his roll.

"Turn 'em loose," he said.

Amok snatched the money and gave the necessary orders. Then they went on to the bank—a tiny, ramshackle place with a bulky office safe, of the vintage of 1885, for a safe deposit vault. A nervous little cashier bobbed around, bowing, chattering, scared to death.

"Yes, sir," he assured Amok, although the latter had not even spoken, but had only scowled. "All is well; I am ever watchful." He bounced over and patted the safe. "Your gold is secure. I, and only I, have the combination. Your gold is safe with me."

Amok hurried Hutch outside.

"He talks too much," he grumbled.

"Have no fears," Hutch replied. "I am not interested in the safe or its contents—that is, in a material sense. I have plenty. I am not starving. The only difference between us is that I have money out working for me while yours is locked up."

Amok bristled.

"*Your* money works, eh?" he sneered. "Well, mine don't have to. My men work for me, and my money remains in the safe."

"All right." Hutch spoke gently; no use rushing the old badger. "All right. Say no more about it."

They walked through the dusty street in silence for awhile. Finally Hutch spoke again.

"You can't blame me, though, for pointing out that you are missing the boat."

Amok peered out on the pier. The daily launch was not yet in sight.

"No, not that kind of boat." Hutch was feeling his way with great care. "I was referring to the ship of finance."

He let this percolate as they entered the house and sat down to lunch.

"What I mean is that while it's true your men are working, the fact remains that your money is locked up. What's stopping you from working both labor and capital?"

Amok looked up sharply.

"Don't you suppose I would put that gold to good use if I had the chance?" he snapped.

"Well?" Hutch casually examined his manicure.

"Well!" Amok snorted in his coconut milk. "The gold is tied up. It secures my issue of nails. I thought you were an economist."

Hutch blinked at him sadly.

"Let's drop it," he suggested. "So elementary."

Amok glared.

"You say *your* money is working for you," Amok reopened the subject. "But how is that when it's right in your pocket?"

That was more like it. Hutch produced his roll and peeled off a bill.

"You secure your nails with gold. That ties up your gold. And your nails aren't any use to you anywhere except on Admiral Island. Now this paper money of mine is good anywhere. And while I use it, the gold behind it is being used to pay debts, buy bonds, earn interest. In short, it is working."

"But how can I use the gold when it secures my own money system?"

"Elementary, my dear Amok. Eleemen-tary."

Amok tapped the table.

"I'm waiting," he snapped.

"Would it be worth anything to you?" Hutch laughed loudly as he saw the old familiar fox-look cross the Chief's face. "Not that it matters—but I just wondered at what figure you would evaluate the services of an expert economist if he showed you how to inflate your currency—say tenfold—and still release your gold."

"Pay? Hmm-hmm."

"Say ten thousand," Hutch tossed out lightly. "A man could build himself a pretty good house with that many nails."

"You mean you'd take nails?" Amok was getting casual himself.

"Why not? They buy coconuts, don't they? And I am nuts over coconuts!"

That night, just before retiring, a messenger called on the visitor to inform him that the Chief had jailed twenty citizens for non-possession of vaccination certificates.

"For what?" ejaculated Hutch. "I don't believe anyone's been vaccinated on this island in his life."

"The white man helped some of us before," the messenger mumbled, gouging the ground with his toe in self-consciousness. "We thought perhaps—"

"You didn't come of your own free will, did you?" Hutch spoke gently.

"Oh, yes, sir."

"But Amok won't be sore when he learns about this visit?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"I'll say he won't. That big bag of dirty linen is just out to gouge me," said the soft-hearted Hutch.

Amok compromised for twenty-five dollars. Old Hutch, benefactor of humanity, paid with an inward smile.

DURING the next few days Old Hutch found occasion to drop in at the bank and make friends.

"Just wanted you to know how favorable an impression your counting house has made on me." He pressed a cigar on the flustered cashier. "That safe, frixample, is certainly a symbol of the rugged character of the place. It inspires confidence."

"It *is* a fine one." The man was as proud as a mother with a cooing babe. "And it is lined with green felt."

"Elegant!" Hutch praised him. "Sometime when it's open I hope you will let me see it. Oh, not now—"

"I could easily open it, I'm sure," the cashier said earnestly. "I remember the combination quite clearly." He looked dreamily into space and twisted his hand to left and right, spinning an imaginary dial.

"Not now," Hutch said. "It wouldn't look right with a stranger in the room."

"Oh, that would be all right. You are the Chief's friend—and there's nothing in the safe really except his gold."

Hutch nodded.

"Still, there's no immediate need. Just the next time you have to open it I'd like to see the lining."

"But I never *have* to open it," the cashier said, kneeling before the dial. He looked up over his shoulder. "You know, I really haven't had it open for years. It may be quite rusty."

It was. It creaked laboriously, like a beer sign in a high wind. And as the door swung slowly open, three hard-shelled doodle-bugs swarmed hungrily out and looked wildly about.

"Oh, dear!" wailed the banker. "It's gone." He turned a tragic face up toward the white man who was humming little songs and in general acting the rôle of nonchalance to the hilt.

"Gone?" The exclamation was pulled out as if by forceps. All this trip, this time and coconut diet for nothing?

"Yes. Every bit of it."

Hutch had vaulted the rail and was on his knees beside the distraught cashier. He peered into the cavernous depths of the safe. It was as barren as an empty briefcase.

"Feel. They've eaten everything."

The poor lug was wailing about the green felt lining! It didn't seem to matter about the gold.

"Sure," Hutch said witheringly. He wondered if he could get the cigar back. "It is a well known fact that little bugs feed on felt and gold. You'll have absolutely no trouble explaining that to the satisfaction of the authorities."

"Authorities?"

"Well, to Chief Bunnynose Amok then. He is a profound student of bugology and will be delighted to learn of this phenomenon. Imagine, little doodle-bugs consuming ten thousand dollars in gold."

"Oh, but they haven't. The gold's in this compartment. See?" The cashier fumbled for a key on his watch chain, tremblingly unlocked the drawer and pulled it open.

The bugs had eaten the cloth bags to shreds. But there was the gold, all right—dull heaps of it. Hutch swallowed imperceptibly and brushed his silk handkerchief lightly over his forehead.

"Here, have another cigar," he said.

OLD HUTCH spent the next two days in his room with his papers and the typewriter. Amok stormed all over the island because his precious typewriter was not available for his daily manhandling. Hutch, working feverishly, could hear him mumbling and thumping about, breaking dishes and making life miserable for the islanders.

Regularly every hour the Chief would shin up the pole and beat a furious tattoo on his paying guest's door.

"What are you doing? When are you coming out? Where's my typewriter? Open the door!"

Hutch finally flung the door back and confronted the nuisance. Amok pushed with his stomach. He peered on either side of the blond bulk which blocked the entrance to the room. Papers everywhere — pretty, colored papers, stacked in piles.

"All right then," Hutch finally conceded. "Come on in and I'll show you my plan."

He went to the desk, tore an engraved blank certificate out of a pad and whipped it into the machine.

"We'll make these yellow ones one hundred," he decided. He typed the figure in on the designated places. Then he stripped the certificate out and handed it over for Amok's inspection. "There you are—genuine, bona fide and impossible to issue in counterfeit because

you will have all the blank forms and the only machine on the island with which to type in the denominations."

Amok fondled the crinkly note. He studied it with care. He even sniffed it with appraising nostrils.

"One hundred," he said slowly. "Hmmm. One hundred what?"

Hutch shrugged.

"Nails. Cigarets. Admirals. Pesos. What does it matter? Here—look these over."

He pointed out the several different colored piles of certificates.

"These blue notes are ones—ten thousand of them. Some typing job, let me assure you. And the green ones are fives—two thousand of them. Then a thousand tens and a thousand twenties—that makes a total of fifty thousand. Now I am just finishing five hundred yellow notes; they're each one hundred. That makes fifty thousand more, or a total of one hundred thousand."

Amok sat down.

"Now listen." Hutch swung his big guns into action. "Here is the inflationary plan in a nutshell. And not a coconutshell either." He made a grimace. "At present you have, let us say, ten thousand nails in circulation. Right?"

"Umph," acknowledged the Chief.

"These nails are secured by ten thousand dollars in gold, which you have, over a period of time, managed to get out of circulation and which now repose in the Admiral Island National Bank subject to your order. Right?"

Amok grunted again.

"I wish you would enunciate clearly," Hutch complained. "After all the work I've done, the least you could do, it seems to me, would be to cooperate. You'd think I was trying to take your precious money instead of giving you mine."

"Hunf," Amok commented strictly through his nose.

"That's better. Now to proceed. My proposal is to offer this new paper money—controlled currency we call it—because what with the blanks and the typewriter you *will* control it—to the people of the island in exchange for their nails. Merely substitute paper for nails. Get it?"

Amok rubbed his chin.

"How will this substitution be made—by force?"

Old Hutch had a glib answer on his tongue.

"Not at all. You will merely issue a bulletin, through the bank, notifying the people that in their interests, you have, at great personal expense, retained the services of an expert economist to bring prosperity to Admiral Island. All they have to do is bring their nail wealth to the bank where it will be retired from circulation. They can have their choice—either the gold which secures the nail currency, or *ten times* the amount of new paper currency. See it?"

"I don't like that agreement about the gold. Suppose they insist upon it? Suppose they take the gold instead of the paper?"

"What if they did? You would get it all back anyway. But they won't. They will prefer to increase their capital tenfold. I personally will see to that. You have my guarantee."

Amok blinked and looked thoughtfully at the paper money.

"What's in it for me?" he asked. "How does it help me?"

Old Hutch threw up his hands and exclaimed:

"How does it help you?" A delicate mixture of horror and contempt flavored the remark. "Why, it increases the spending power of the island tenfold. Or pretty near it. You'll have one hundred thousand units where you now have ten thousand. That's a guarantee of free spending. And on top of that the plan will release the gold for your private use."

"How?" Amok whispered. He was enunciating clearly enough now.

"Because," Hutch boomed triumphantly, "the paper money will be secured under the terms of the agreement not by gold *but by nails!*"

IT WAS a great day for Admiral Island. Old Hutch was seated at a table in the bank building literally surrounded by paper money—and with an empty keg in which to deposit returned nails.

"Rusty or bright; bent or straight. Each and every one is good as new," he bellowed cheerily.

A crowd of islanders pushed and scuffled to see this internationally famous economist and to read the neatly typed announcement tacked up on the bulletin board and signed by the Chief.

"New money—ten times what you had—or gold. It says so in the announcement. Take your choice. Only if you take the gold you get only one for one. The new money is ten to one. Prosperity has come to Admiral Island. Step up and cash in, boys. Line forms on the right."

It was glorious. The nails poured in and the new money poured out. Amok hovered in the background, ever watchful. Suspicious fellow—and Old Hutch the very soul of honor!

Beer flowed freely. There was a growing spirit of jubilation. Carnival time had come at last. Bills were paid; dice appeared; life moved rosily, swiftly.

Hutch caught Amok's eye and winked.

"Good goin', what? My nails are coming in fast; not many outstanding now."

Amok grinned.

"That's so," he conceded, "*your* nails. Good pay." There was something slightly like derision in his tone.

Hutch did not seem to notice.

"The people are buying freely. From your stores. No doubt you have put up your prices?"

A light dawned on Amok. He turned and charged through the crowd as if motivated by all the electricity in Muscle Shoals.

"He forgot to change his prices." Hutch grinned at the cashier. "And I didn't tell him until I had practically all the nails in hand. Give the good folks a break, say I." As he spoke he received a large bag of nails from an eager citizen.

"Hurry, please," the man begged.

"How many nails have you, friend?"

The man told him, and Hutch swiftly counted out new bills and waved him off. He would take his word. What were a few rusty spikes, more or less?

The last customer came and departed. The cashier looked up from his labors. Yes, all but twenty of the nails were there. It was wonderful. His eyes shone in admiration for this colossus of finance who could miraculously draw practically every last nail from mattress, sock, pocket and teapot.

"Now they're yours," he said. "What will you do with them? Build a house?"

Hutch pondered.

"No-o-o," he said thoughtfully. "I hardly think so." He smiled, slowly. "Amok and I have other plans. Big plans. You will understand."

The cashier nodded.

"Tell you what," Hutch said suddenly. "I'll just cash these nails in for gold."

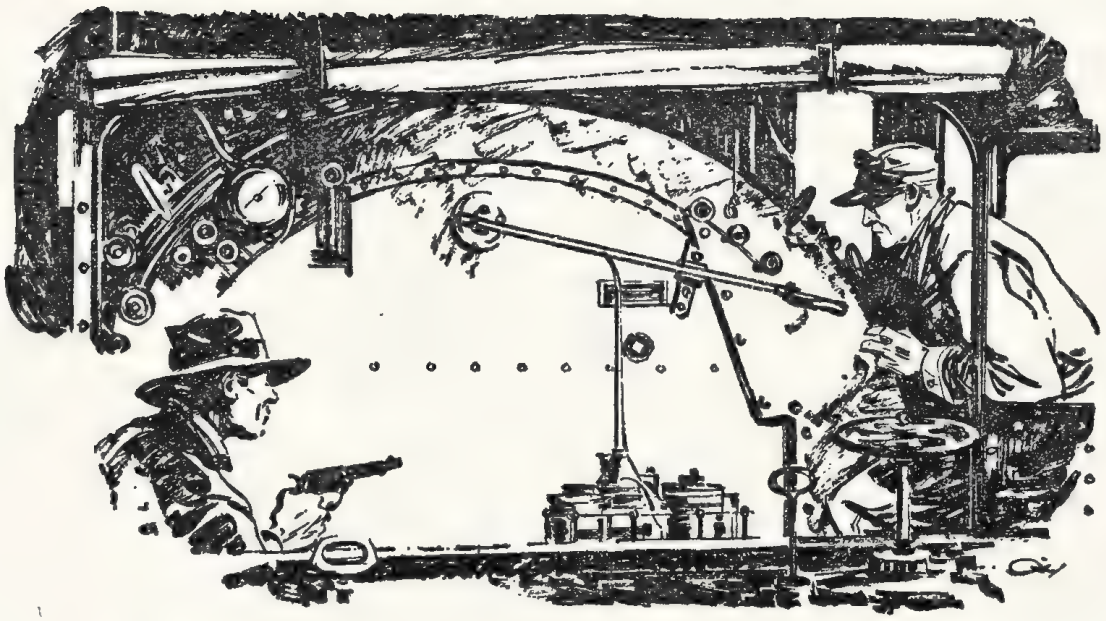
The banker's jaw fell.

"Come. Come," said Hutch. "You heard Amok say the nails were mine. Just a moment ago. Oh, I know what I'm doing," Hutch said. "Even have it in writing." He tossed over a formal contract, signed by Amok, agreeing to the fee in nails. "And there on the bulletin board is his authorization for the bank to accept the nails at par for gold, at the owner's option. All right?"

The cashier opened the safe and waved to Hutch to help himself.

"I have the other twenty nails," he said obligingly. "If you will issue me the necessary certificates." He went to his desk drawer and produced them.

"Be a good fellow and help me carry this stuff down to the pier," Hutch replied. "Just because Amok has missed too many boats is no reason for me to do likewise. The launch pushes off shortly. And here—" he flipped a twenty-dollar gold piece across the safe —"as one banker to another, take the gold and let the paper go." He smiled. "Who knows, you may want to get a tooth filled some day."



HIGH-WHEELER

By the Author of "Million Dollar Extra"

WILLIAM EDWARD HAYES

BIG JACK BARRY turned jerkily from the window and watched the door. The left half of his rugged face was touched by the pale shaft of light from the westering sun. A strong face, sharply etched and duly weathered. Determination was in it, as there was power in every line of his solid frame. Incredible that this hard-fisted mountain of a man should know fear.

His eyes, on the door, were narrowed. His lips were compressed. He looked like a man who could laugh at death. In the past he had, as a cinder-bitten, high-wheeling locomotive runner, often laughed at death. But that was before the night on the reverse curves west of Three Rivers when Big Jack, with an unfinished song on his lips, had crashed to the very rim of death in the cab of four hundred thousand pounds of synchronized steam and rolling steel. Suddenly whipped in sight of Conductor Bilbo Sergeant's red caboose, standing helplessly on the main line where its train had broken down, there had been no time to stop. The flagman from the standing tonnage had not gone back to give a following freight due warning.

Four hundred thousand pounds of iron and steel and steam. No man recalled exactly all that happened. There had been no chance to jump. Into a rain of splinters from shattered cars his engine had thundered, reared up on its trailer trucks, swapped ends magnificently, and had then come to rest on its right-hand side with Big Jack pinned in the telescoped cab. Then came the scalding, cooking burst of steam from a broken pipe.

Only after what had seemed an eternity of unendurable suffering had come extrication. Hard railroad men had

raised him with womanly tenderness; and a local doctor, administering an opiate, had gravely shaken his head.

Perhaps it was because Big Jack Barry was a fighter that he now stood in this room at all.

There came a fumbling hand at the knob. Abruptly the door opened. A man entered and closed it. He stood without speaking. In all respects he was a smaller edition of the man at the window. The same depth of blue eyes, the same tilted nose and square chin. They were brothers.

"Well, ol'-timer!"

It was Mickey Barry, the smaller man, who spoke first. His effort at levity in the greeting was apparent. The note was plainly false. His sudden smile was a movement of wide lips only. His eyes were grave with the pain behind them. He advanced with the hesitant air of a man who brings bad news and doesn't know quite how to break it.

"How goes it, Jack? Sure has been a hot day."

"So what?" Big Jack's voice was sharp. His fingers closed convulsively.

"Get a good rest today, ol'-timer?" Still the parrying.

"Don't stall, kid. Let me have it." Big Jack's chin came out savagely. "You been to see the boss—about me?"

The smile left Mickey's lips. The pain stayed behind the blue of his sober gaze. He dropped his eyes to study a calloused palm.

"It wasn't my doin', Jack," Mickey said. He cleared his throat uncomfortably. "I went to see the super because he—"

"He sent for you," Jack broke in with bitterness. "I know."

"You know?" Mickey's eyes were startled.

"I heard. When I dropped down the mountain this mornin' on a westbound drag I heard 'em talkin' in the roundhouse. They didn't know I was there. I heard what they said. Big Jack Barry with a yeller streak, an' the super sendin' for you to see if you couldn't straighten him out."

"Nobody said yellow," Mickey objected quickly. "Nobody ever said that. They might've said you were afraid, but—"

"Afraid, hell! It's the same thing in their minds."

"Sit down, Jack," Mickey counseled. He put a hand on his brother's arm. "We're gonna talk. I got to tell you—"

"Lay off that stuff! Talk!" Jack broke in fiercely, brushing the hand aside. "I'll listen. An' then I'll tell you what I think of you, the super an' this pussyfootin' around."

"Who's pussyfootin'?" Red spots glowed in Mickey's cheeks. His eyes steeled. He was fighting Irish from his square toes to the red brush of his hair.

"What the hell else is it?" Jack demanded. "My business is my business. If the super's got anything to say to me—"

"He has. Plenty. An' he tried to say it two weeks ago. But you wouldn't listen. He was tryin' to be kind, an' you froze up like a dead engine in a blizzard. You gotta listen now, ol'-timer. You can't go on like you have since you got outta the hospital, an' you know it. You got to get away from a railroad—a hell of a long way from engines. You got to rest an' get your nerves back an' get that smash off your mind."

"An' that's what the super's tryin' to get you to do? Get me outta the way easy?" Jack took a threatening step forward.

"Nobody's tryin' to get you outta the way, Jack," Mickey retorted. "The only thing is, you can't go on runnin' an engine like you are now. You can't tie up the railroad by creepin' into curves an' stallin' along when you oughtta be hittin' the high spots. It's the stallin'—"

"Shut up!" Big Jack's fingers closed over his brother's wrist. "Don't tell me I stall. An' don't think I'm leavin' this

pike. I've got rights here. Fifteen years, an' I'm stayin' right in an engine cab until—"

"Until you make one more performance like you did with the westbound you brought in this mornin'. Fifteen hours on the road when you should 'a' taken ten. You damn near drove two sets of train dispatchers nuts, tryin' to get you to rollin'. An' the super! Listen, Jack; he's been our friend ever since you an' me came here to run engines."

"Friend?" Jack snorted scornfully. "You call a guy a friend who wants to can you?"

"Damn it, listen to me! Don't think it's easy for me to tell you this. Hell, no! But I'm tellin' you for your own sake. Me an' you. We built a rep for fast runnin'. We're high-wheelers. How you think I feel, seein' you fallin' down, when a few months ago you could outrun any man-jack that ever pulled a throttle bar?"

"An' I can do it now," Jack retorted vehemently.

"You ain't been doin' it," Mickey snapped. "An' that's the trouble. You gotta get those nerves back. You gotta get where you ain't afraid there'll be a pair of red lights around every curve. You gotta—"

"So you think I'm yeller, too!" Jack cried. "Go on. Say it. I know they all think that. An' you an' the super think it, an' you wanna ease me out—"

"Yeller!" Mickey hurled the word scornfully. "If I thought that—"

"Don't lie!" Jack suddenly loomed large above the other Barry.

"Who lies?"

"You do!"

Rage blinded Jack for the moment. A sudden hate for his brother surged through him—a mad hate that had its conception in the knowledge that Mickey Barry wasn't lying about the nerves and the fear. The fear was there. Big Jack knew it even as he vehemently denied it.

"Well," Mickey said with a shrug, hopelessly, "if you got it in your own head that you're yeller—"

Jack Barry's doubled left caught Mickey on the jaw. There was the sharp impact of bone and knuckles. Mickey staggered back against the rumpled bed. Eyes flaming, the smaller man returned the stabbing punch and caught his brother in the chest—the first blows struck between them in twenty years.

"To—da—damn—yellow," Mickey panted as he sought to reach the other, "to—to face—the truth—"

How long they fought they did not know. The smaller man was tough, but against the ponderous onslaught of the other courage would not avail him much longer. They overturned and smashed a chair. Once Big Jack staggered and slumped back against the wash-stand. The china pitcher toppled over and fell with a crash. He recovered himself in time to stop Mickey's furious rush. The smaller man clinched Big Jack about the neck. The latter broke the hold, swung with his right, sent Mickey spinning back against the wall.

IT WAS into this stage of the fight that the roundhouse foreman came, having run in answer to the landlady's crying telephone appeal. He waded in between the enginemen.

"Hey, you mutts!" The foreman had a fog-horn voice. "If you guys wanna kill each other, pick some other time. I'm needin' engineers."

"I'll lay the big stiff—" Mickey's voice had more venom than power. It came weakly from his throat.

The foreman had him by the shoulder.

"You won't lay anybody cold," the foreman countered, "if that's what you mean. An' you, you big tub!" He whirled on Jack, who blinked his eyes and glowered. "I don't know what the argument's about, but it's business now before pleasure."

"You line outta here," Jack bawled at the foreman, "before I give you some

of the same. I'm fed up on interferin'—"

"Crack down, big noise," the foreman cut in. "I'm here on business. You can finish the assassination when you ain't got anything else to do. Right now I'm callin' the two of you for a job of engine runnin'. That is, if either of you has got enough sight left to see a signal."

"I got the sight," Jack retorted. "What's the call?"

"It's first an' second 42," the foreman snapped. "Two sections of the mail an' express east tonight. You draw the first one, Jack, an' this other warrior's behind you. Ten minutes on your tail. You know what that means?"

Jack saw the foreman gaze up at him meaningly. An inner tremor shook him. He shifted his eyes.

"It means," the foreman spat mercilessly, "you gotta step through the dew, Big Jack. Get me? No more of this dallyin'. Not with the mail. That's contract stuff an' it runs on time." The foreman turned abruptly to Mickey. His pudgy fingers touched the puff beneath Mickey's right eye. "You think you can make it, Mick? With that?"

"If they keep that big cheese over there outta my way, I'll make it."

At Mickey's pronouncement, Big Jack suddenly flared up again. He was set for a fresh charge, but the foreman stopped it. His thick hand shoved violently into Jack's ribs. Then he grabbed Mickey by the arm.

"I'll see you to your engine alive, anyhow," he said. "You better come on."

GREEN flags whipped under the green lights that glowed on the boiler front of Jack Barry's long-barreled road hog. Behind the engine, eight steel mail and express cars were stretched. A helper locomotive was coupled on at the rear. Lights bobbed up and down along the train.

In the dancing flare of his hand torch, Big Jack's face was drawn and grim as he walked about his drive-wheels with his long-necked oiler. He poked the spout of the can into the oil-holes. He moved mechanically. Normally he was a man slow to anger, but once aroused anger burned in him like a consuming flame.

He came around the pilot of the engine, and down the right side wheels. Another torch came into his vision. On the neighboring track, cab to cab with his, stood another engine. The breath from its ashpan was warm. A full head of steam blubbered against the pops. He glanced sharply over his shoulder. Mickey, clad in overalls and a long-vizored cap, above which goggles perched, was oiling the gears of the second engine.

They approached each other slowly. No word was spoken. Big Jack turned his head hesitantly. He saw Mickey looking at him. Mickey's eyes glowed with scorn. Abruptly Mickey spat, an eloquent gesture of disdain.

Mike Flannery, Jack's conductor, came between the two. He held up his lantern.

"You better get set," Mike said sharply. "Here's the orders. We own the whole damn railroad."

Jack took the proffered tissues. He shoved them in his pocket without reading them. He poked at another oil-hole.

"The dispatcher's givin' us the best of it," the conductor said. "No reason why we can't clip 'em off, Jack." He jerked out his watch. "What you got?"

Jack produced his timepiece. Conductor and engineer compared time. It was the usual ritual.

"Ten seconds apart," Mike Flannery commented. "Well, come on. You can take the bridle off."

"Get on an' ride," Jack growled, trusting himself to speak to the skipper. "I'll worry about the bridle."

The skipper thought he was yellow too, did he? Jack glared at him and tossed his wrench and oilcan up to the deck. He followed the tools and climbed up. He put his wrench down

by his feet at his seat cushion. The orders were read, and he passed them to his fireman. Wick Kennedy, the sooty mate in the cab, glanced over the tissues and handed them back. Engineer and fireman compared watches. The time was 7:14.

Big Jack adjusted his goggles. He glanced at lubricator and gages, but only half saw them. He poked his head into the gathering dark and looked behind.

The conductor's lantern, near the end of the train, rose in the signal to "take 'em away." Big Jack jerked twice on his whistle cord, sent two sharp blasts into the gloom; they were taken up in echo by the helper engine.

"Green eye!" Wick Kennedy called the change in the color on the semaphore mast.

"Clear," Jack grumbled in repeating.

HIS throttle arm came back just as it had done on many nights before. Steam hissed through the branch pipe into the cylinders. The cross heads moved; main and side rods responded. And all these motions centered in one vast snort from the squat stack. The drivers turned.

The helper engine buckled against the tonnage. First No. 42 rolled away with brake shoes hanging free, the helper shooting sky-rockets into the starless dark.

For eleven miles eastward from Bellew the grade ascended sharply, the ruling percentage 2.2. On the time card the regular schedule of 42 called for thirty-five minutes to the summit—the little telegraph office of Iceline at the end of Horsethief Pass.

Eleven miles in thirty-five minutes is little more than a creep, yet on a grade like that one up the continental divide it meant a wide open throttle. Big Jack gave his two hundred tons of locomotive all that she could stand. Wick Kennedy banged scoop after scoop of coal into the roaring firebox, painting the backward flying smoke plume with white and orange and yellow.

Big Jack's eyes, narrowed behind his goggles, followed the swath the blade of his quivering headlight cut. Crossing guards, whistle posts and culverts came up and passed to the blackness behind. He knew them without being conscious of them. They were blurred in his vision.

Jack transferred to the engine some of the fierceness he had failed to vent wholly on Mickey. He gave it an unmerciful beating, which is to say that he handled it without consideration of fuel or steam or his fireman's strong back. Twice Wick rested on his scoop and glared across the cab at the engineman.

Of this Jack Barry was not conscious; not until he felt his sleeve jerked and turned to see his fireman's sooty features.

"It's all right," Wick shouted above the clamoring din, "to beat the stack off her by the roots, but I ain't no stokin' machine, see? I just got two arms an' one back. You hook her up higher, or I'll let her die on you right here."

The fireman tossed the scoop into the coal and climbed to his seat. The needle on the steam gage quivered. Wick's objection was not to the speed, such as it was, but to the fact that Jack Barry was operating the big engine so that keeping it hot would soon be a physical impossibility. Jack, without speaking, raised his Johnson bar mechanically for a shorter cut-off, thereby getting maximum efficiency of operation and speed with the use of less steam. Wick, seeing the move, went back to work.

Curving on a shelf, eight miles out of Bellew, Big Jack looked back down the mountain. Far below him, running at right angles with his position now, he saw the silver beam of his brother's locomotive headlight. He watched until the curve took the spectacle from his vision.

FIRST 42 climbed over the crest at Iceline at 7:48 and came to a stop. Jack looked at his watch. Two minutes to spare. Wick Kennedy glanced at his own dial and looked up with an incredulous frown.

"Lookit! Ahead of the card." He showed his watch to Jack.

The engineer twisted his lips in scorn. He ignored the fireman's remark. He took the water jug off the end of the tender, turned it to his lips. His mouth was hot, his throat dry. The water seemed to stay in his throat when he swallowed.

Mike Flannery, the skipper, was under the cab window.

"No orders for us here," Mike called up. "Soon's they get that helper off we'll tear out. An' don't let any rust gather on them tires." It was Mike's idea of joking.

"I'll run this engine," Big Jack retorted savagely. "You look after the train."

The old man winced slightly. His eyes mirrored his surprise. In the old days no one had ever heard Big Jack talk like this. But the old days were before the night at Three Rivers.

"Must 'a' been eatin' meat raw," Mike mused, "else his stumick's blowed up."

Mike Flannery had heard about Big Jack's failing. He had made no trip with the hoghead since the Three Rivers wreck. He shook his head as he walked away.

Eastward from Iceline the track was level for exactly one mile. Then came the big dip down the eastern slope of the divide. Twenty-six miles of 2.2 grade descending to hit flat country once again at White Cloud. The time card allowed No. 42 to make the drop in forty minutes flat. All other first class trains must take fifty, because other first class trains carried passengers, while 42 was only mail and express.

Big Jack's anger began to lessen in its intensity when the pilot of his locomotive dipped over the end of the level track. Wick Kennedy, having fixed his fire, prepared himself for twenty-six miles of rest on the left-hand cushion. He sat looking into the night, humming a wordless tune. Jack glanced over at him, closed his throttle all but just a crack. The coaches shoved against the drawheads; the wheels clicked over the rail joints with increasing momentum.

The engine lurched suddenly into a left-hand curve. Big Jack Barry forgot, for the moment, to be mad. He forgot everything but his brake valve, and he used it heavily. Wick shot him a glance that seemed to say:

"I tol' you so! He can't do it! The big guy! He's afraid of the gun."

Big Jack took the curves easy. He told himself that he'd give the engine her head when once he had some tangent. The fear came up. He swallowed. He hated himself. He kicked his brake valve free, only to slap the air to his wheels again. He glanced across the cab and saw Wick Kennedy fooling with his watch. He told himself, vehemently, that this was 42; that it had to run; that it had to make the time. He told himself that, but on these curves he seemed physically stricken, completely unable to ease the pounding of his heart.

He bounced suddenly from his cushion, stood with his legs apart on the rumbling deck and hoisted the water jug to his lips. Replacing it in the locker of the tender, he went to the fireman's side of the gangway and looked back. He saw the blinking yellow of the marker light on his rear coach, his train curving true in his engine's wake.

He clamped his teeth together and goaded himself back to his seat. His eyes followed the headlight, picking out the jagged rocks that walled him in. The rocks flung back the engine noises against his eardrums.

Out of the noises came Mickey's voice:

"You can't tie up the railroad, creepin' into curves, an' stallin'—"

Pain quickly stamped Jack's features.

He glanced across at his fireman. He met Wick Kennedy's perturbed glance. Truly, Mickey had called the turn. Mickey, in Big Jack's visual consciousness, was calling it now. Big Jack Barry was afraid to run.

The telegraph station of Spire came out of the night at the end of the canyon. The green eye of the semaphore glowed bravely. At the east end of the passing track, where the timetable figure applied, Big Jack looked at his watch. He knew that he hadn't been making the time. The watch told him clearly. The two minutes he had had to spare at the summit were wiped out. He was three minutes off and not improving, which, he swore under his breath, wouldn't do. Impulsively he released the binding brake shoes to get a better roll.

Again a swinging curve, and the straight track ended. The train rumbled through a narrow gorge, deep in a slice out of the earth. Big Jack's gloved hand passed nervously from brake valve to throttle and back. He saw, from the side of his goggles, Wick Kennedy get up restlessly from his cushion. The fireman took a squint at the blaze, added a few scoops to the bright spots. He came to stand beside the engineer in silence. Jack was conscious of his presence, knew that Wick seemed about to speak; but the fireman, if such were his intention, refrained and went back to sit down.

They rolled by Piperock five minutes behind time. The engine eased across the miniature flat, twisted to the right and then to the left, and came presently to the downward slanting shelf high on the cliff above Black Medicine Valley. On the left, the wall of rock rose sheer a thousand feet. At Big Jack's elbow the drop was precipitous to the valley, two thousand feet below. It was, to a normal man, a breathless piece of track. To Big Jack Barry it was something that he dared not think about. He checked his speed and kept his eyes averted.

Off to the east a cluster of tiny yellow dots marked the lights of White Cloud, the end of the long descent. Jack watched them with a new determination in his heart. Beyond White Cloud there would be tangents, level and free. Beyond White Cloud he would get back on time.

On the tangent approach to the town Wick Kennedy reared up on his cushion and poked his head through the window. Big Jack, attracted by the sudden motion, looked over across the cab. He saw his fireman on his knees, looking rearward. While he gazed Wick's watch came out, and the fireman whirled about, startled. His eyes were wide. He got to the deck and crossed to Jack.

"He's sure as hell crowdin' us," Wick said tightly.

"Now—yes," Jack said. The reference, of course, was to Mickey Barry's headlight, all too close back there on the flat. "From here on—well—"

Big Jack had no faith in his words. Mickey was crowding him because Mickey was trying to make the time. Ten minutes was supposed to separate them. Big Jack would have to pull away to the lead in this merciless and relentless urge of time. He'd have to snap out of it with this mail, or . . .

"No more of this dallyin'." The words of the roundhouse foreman smote his inner consciousness ominously. "Not with the mail. That's contract stuff an' it runs on time."

On time! On time! Big Jack hated the words. All these years he had been a slave to them. He had sped along the steel faster than the best of them, staying on time. What for? He had been racing to make up time that night at Three Rivers.

He started abruptly. The platform at White Cloud was a gray blur under his cab. He saw a lantern signal tossing viciously in a highball sign. The operator was waving him on. A surge of resentment against such a signal came up the column of his throat. As if Jack Barry couldn't run!

THE dimmed headlight of a freight train in the westbound siding came into Jack's vision, and mechanically he pulled his whistle cord. The *whaaaaaaaaa! whaa! whaa!* from his whistle's throat—the long and two short blasts—told the man in the hole that first No. 42 had green lights on front, and the freighter whistled twice to let Jack Barry know he understood.

The watch dial said twelve minutes off. Jack shot his brake shoes free. He ripped along the side of the standing train, the din of his passing smacking against his harried brain. He was on his first long tangent now—five miles of level running with no perceptible bend on the shining ribbons his headlight bathed. His throttle arm came back to give him greater speed. He hurled a crossing blast to the night. Behind him he saw the aureole of Mickey's mad advance, dim with distance. He told himself he would have to pull away.

It was, all things considered, a noble effort. He opened up until he had his engine paced at close to sixty miles. Wick Kennedy straightened from his scoop with something of a hopeful light on his begrimed face. But that five miles was all too short to gain back even so much as one lost minute, and when the curve on the rise above Digby came into view, Jack's air was on to steady the train for the bend.

"Stallin'—creepin' into curves."

Oh, well. There'd soon be Broken Bow. A nice dip down and up. He could open wide for the swing. He could win this chase. He could show the boss and Mickey if he was afraid to run. He could show 'em all. He'd open up an' let the old girl have it down the sag at Broken Bow.

The operator at Digby was on the platform with his lantern and a pair of hoops. Jack saw the dim man poised, the wicker loop gleaming yellow in the headlight. He got to the gangway and leaned far out, his arm extended. Unerringly he speared the hoop, plucked the yellow fold of a message from the clip and tossed the hoop back to the dark.

Jack's fingers steadily spread the message under the gage lights. His eyes narrowed as he read:

> CONDR & ENGR, 1ST 42, AT DIGBY:
> IF YOU FAIL TO PASS BROKEN BOW BY 9:02, STOP AT CARDINGTON TO EXPLAIN CAUSE POOR RUNNING TIME AND RECEIVE FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS.

The telegram bore the super's signature. Big Jack stared at the writing. His watch was in his hand when he heard five short peeps on the air whistle above the boiler butt. The signal told him that back on the train Conductor Mike Flannery had also read and now was demanding full speed ahead by tugging on his bell cord.

Jack continued to stare. He looked at his watch blankly, put it away. He folded the message and tucked into the bib pocket of his overalls. No such message had ever been received by Big Jack Barry before. He was like a man stunned. Broken Bow by 9:02. It seemed incredible. Explain poor running time. He, a high-wheeler, once one of the fastest. He turned glumly. His throttle arm reached up. His hand fell heavily on the end of the bar.

Because it was 9:06 when he shot through the sag at Broken Bow, Big Jack expected the worst at Cardington. Accordingly, a full fifteen minutes late, he came in sight of the red eye of the semaphore, closed his throttle and drifted down to an ignominious stop.

The operator came from the office. Old Mike, hopping over the platform from the rear, came up under the cab.

"The Old Man wants to know," the operator said, "if you guys—"

"I know what he wants," Mike broke in harshly. He turned fiery eyes up to his engineer. "You wanna alibi yourself, Jack Barry, or you want me to fix it."

Big Jack stared at his glove. He tried to find something to say.

"I heard there was somethin' wrong with you," old Mike said heartlessly. His face was red. He apparently felt the disgrace of having a train in his charge fall down as this one had. "I thought it was just talk."

The conductor turned on his heel. Big Jack stared after him with smoldering eyes. Behind him a whistle bellowed the long blast of a station call. Mickey was on his tail. The other high-wheeling Barry. There came two short toots. Mickey had picked up the first section's flag.

Mike Flannery came running from the telegraph office with his arms waving.

"I'll get the switch," he yelled. "We head in here an' pull down the sidin'. We change orders with the second man. He'll carry the green from here on, thanks to you, you poor . . ."

His voice became indistinct with his running. He unlocked the siding switch and raised his lantern. Big Jack cracked the throttle and drifted off the main line like a racer ruled off the track. The lights became blurred. His face and eyes burned, his throat was hot and dry and a great weariness assailed him. He felt that he had come to the end of time.

He saw his conductor glare up at him as the engine clanked over the switch. But Big Jack Barry felt no anger. He felt little of anything except a strange sense of peace. He was all through, all washed up. The fight was over. No one needed to tell him what the super would say to him tomorrow.

The second section's engine, displaying green, panted at the platform while the orders were exchanged and new ones issued. In another moment Mickey would be streaking off. The other Barry of that once unbeatable running team would thunder eastward and leave Big Jack to eat his smoke. Big Jack thought of Mickey and, strangely, there was no rancor in his heart. He relived that scene of the late afternoon. Mickey had been trying to help. No use being sore. So he reasoned.

Mickey's engine whistled and came bellowing down. Jack, from his cushion, looked across the space between the siding and the main. For only the briefest fraction of a second the eyes of the two Barrys met—goggled eyes which gave no indication of their emotions. And then Big Jack was left alone to stare at the billowing plume of his brother's smoke.

"Here y'are," Conductor Flannery piped up. He climbed three steps of the gangway, handed up new orders. "Pull on down to the switch. I'll open the gate an' let you out, an' as far as I'm concerned you can take all night to get us in."

Jack took his orders and obeyed his conductor's command. He said nothing. There was, after all, nothing to say, no bluff to maintain. Tonight would be the last. He looked about at the old familiar landmarks. Tomorrow—well, that would be something else again.

Second 42 left Cardington at 9:25, not more than five minutes behind the first; which, any way you look at it, was against the rules. But, as Mike Flannery said to his engineer:

"Might as well keep goin'. Mickey, he'll be ten minutes ahead of us before you can get to the top of the hill yonder."

THE engine purred along at slightly more than forty miles an hour, once Jack got his costly cargo under way. Wick Kennedy heaved his coal and kept humming his wordless tune. The clouds broke over the full moon, now high in the southeast, and the flats were washed with silver.

It was just around the curve at Cinnamon bend that Big Jack sensed something wrong. He consciously heard nothing to indicate another presence in his cab. His head had been through his side window, watching the track. He heard, even as he turned at the strange foreboding which suddenly assailed him,

the clatter of the scoop to the steel plate of the engine deck.

He first saw Wick Kennedy's startled eyes. Then Wick's hands were reaching toward the roof. Another turn of his head, and Jack's hand suddenly came down from his throttle. A black-hatted man, whose rough chin was out of the shadow, confronted him. He was low and heavily built, and his right hand held a gun.

"Take it easy, you two," the new voice spoke, just loud enough to be heard above the working engine. "Take it easy an' nothin'll happen." The gun was shoved into the fireman's ribs. Wick backed against the tool shelf above the fire door. He turned a quick side glance to Jack.

"What the hell is this?" Jack suddenly demanded, half out of his seat.

"Sit down!" The gunman's bark was fierce. "Sit down, an' you'll find out soon enough."

Jack peered into the deep shadows beyond the man's shoulder, looking for others. The first thing that flashed through his mind was the mail he was pulling. He cleared his throat, gulped, sank slowly to his seat.

"No funny business, see?" the gunman snapped. "You boys just take it easy. You run along till I tell you not to, an' then—"

"You better let me get at my fire," Wick retorted, "or we won't run very far." His hands were still elevated.

"Don't let that worry you none," the visitor growled. "You ain't goin' far anyhow. So you, fireman, crawl up on your seat over there where I can watch you. Step!"

Jack saw Wick obey. The fireman didn't once lower his arms. The gunman stepped back a pace so that he could detect any sudden moves on the part of either engineman. He eased closer to Jack, stood at the engineer's shoulder.

"Keep your eyes ahead," the gunman ordered, "an' listen."

Big Jack was not listening. He was thinking about his mail. He was wondering how many more of these sinister figures might be back there on the train. His mind was racing.

"—an' when you get to the bridge—the wooden bridge," Big Jack heard the gunman saying, "you shut off an' stop. Right after we go over it."

That struck Jack as queer. The bridge, three miles ahead, was in lonely territory, a long distance from a highway. If this man's designs were on his train, how would his partners get away? The question needed no answer. He heard the gunman's next words:

"The fireman uncouples the engine. See? Then we take it ahead, an' you boys get off when I say. Outside of tyin' you up for awhile—"

Such a move, to Jack, could mean but one thing. It was not his train, but Mickey's, in which the bandits were interested. And the play, as the gunman outlined it, meant to stop any interference. But where would the gunmen stop Mickey? Jack searched his brain. There was only one place where a highway ran close, and that was at Three Rivers. He sat bolt upright and turned to face the shadowy figure. A highway was necessary in this barren land for a getaway.

"Just what the hell you think you're doin'?" he demanded. "Pullin' a job on that mail in the lead?"

"Wise guy," the gunman retorted savagely. "Figger out things, don't you! "Yeh, that's the dope. An' when I get through with you an' this engine, you won't be in anybody's way. Least, you'll be a long time gettin' to Three Rivers, an' that's what I'm here to see you don't do."

"If you can stop that first section at Three Rivers," Jack said, "you'll be workin' miracles. The feller that's haulin' that mail will be chargin' down on that town—"

"The feller that's runnin' that engine," the gunman replied behind a sour grin, "is bein' taken care of right now. See? He's got a coupla gents in his cab

that's there to see he does just like you're gonna do—what you're told. An' don't try to pass that bridge. I'll know it when I hear the wheels rollin' over it, so you shut that throttle or you'll damn well wish you had."

But Jack had stopped listening. He was thinking of his brother. Mickey would never give up without a fight, and a fight with these gunmen would probably mean death. Perhaps even at this moment Mickey's body lay riddled with bullets. A feeling almost of nausea swept over him as he thought of his own unmerited attack on his brother, the terrific beating he had cruelly given him—for what?

It was twenty-two miles from Cardington to Three Rivers. The running time, owing to one slight grade and the reverse curves on the approach to the town, was thirty-three minutes. Mickey had left Cardington at 9:20. He would try to make up lost time unless the bandits in his cab interfered. But grant that he could make it in thirty minutes; he would arrive at 9:50. It was 9:33 now, and Big Jack, as he reasoned on these things in an effort to map out a quick course to follow, picked up a landmark that told him he was nineteen miles from the bandits' goal. There was a bare chance that he might be in time.

Jack's right foot stirred on the floor in front of his cushion. His heel touched the handle of his spanner wrench, the tool he had placed there when leaving Bellew. Not much of a weapon against a gun, he reasoned, but there was just one chance.

He glanced over his shoulder. The bandit stood alertly near him. Jack was grateful that this right leg and arm were in the shadow, completely out of line with the bandit's vision. He crouched forward on his arm-rest and kept working with his foot. Presently he knew he had the handle of the wrench pointed upward against the side of the cab. His leg, feeling against it, assured him. He held his leg there to keep the wrench from falling.

THE engine was running swiftly now, down a descending grade. Jack, unmindful of anything but the plan he had in his head, estimated his speed. He was running close to seventy. In another three miles he would reach the bridge the gunman had mentioned.

Keeping his eyes directly ahead, he took his right arm off the window rest, let it slip down to his side. He did this slowly so that the watchful bandit would be conscious of no move of his body. Presently his fingers felt the handle of the fourteen-inch wrench and closed about it with an iron grip. Another minute had passed. The bridge was closer. He kept his left hand high on his throttle.

The gunman came up beside him, leaning over and peering through the right-hand window. A great white barn, close to the track, flashed by. The gun was shoved into Jack's left ribs.

"Shut 'er off," the gunman bellowed. "That bridge, now—"

So the gunman even had the landmarks spotted, did he? Well planned, this job. Jack compressed his lips. He crouched. His left hand closed over his throttle latch. His right, in the shadow, held grimly to the wrench.

"You gonna stop?" the gunman bellowed, half turning to the engineer.

"Right now!"

Jack's lightning motions began with his words. He came half out of his seat. His left arm jabbed the throttle shut. His right, with the speed of light, whipped around with the wrench. That weapon, aimed true, smashed through the guards of the water glass on the boiler directly in line with the gunman's face.

Even as the gunman, sensing what was happening a fraction too late, pulled his trigger, the cab became a roaring inferno—a scalding hell. Two hundred pounds of steam to the square inch blew from the break. From the cloud came a howl of pain, then a fierce shout.

Jack, shielding himself with his gloved

hands and keeping out of line of the main blow by hugging the back head of the boiler, yelled—

"You got him, Wick?"

"I got 'im!" Wick's cry was muffled, seemed to come from the very fire-door, directly under the water glass.

Jack knew that Wick, taking a chance on some burns himself, had plunged low under the cloud where the damage would be least, and had tackled the gunman.

Big Jack, still shielding his eyes, reached around the boiler end, felt the gage glass shut-off cocks and began to tighten down. The steam burned his arm through his coveralls, but he didn't notice it. The awful hiss might have reminded him of that night in his wrecked cab at Three Rivers, but did not. His only thought was overhauling Mickey—that leading section—speed.

The cab lurched dizzily on a curve in response to a wider throttle. The steam cloud died. Wick, part of his face burned, was tying up the gunman, who was still conscious although helpless and suffering intense pain. Jack opened the first aid kit.

"Burned much, Wick?" Jack called.

"Me? Hell, no. I'll get this guy on my seat an' give you a fire."

Wick resumed with the scoop, and the steam gage went back to normal. So did Big Jack Barry. He widened on his throttle and heaved up his bar, until the giant locomotive, a long black streak on wheels, was talking back to him with a roar in her stack.

He whipped his coaches across five miles of tangent in slightly more than three minutes without being at all aware that his drivers were a blur with their polished rods at ninety miles an hour. He took a curve for all it would stand, and when it seemed his outside wheels would climb the rails, he merely hung on and slugged it to her. He "beat that engine on the back"; he used every device of lomotive running in his maddening pace.

The whistle above his head peeped out four times imperiously. The conductor was ringing for less speed.

When the second command came, Big Jack stood up on the deck. He called to Wick.

"You go back an' tell 'em where we're goin'. Otherwise they'll be pullin' the air on us from the rear."

"I ain't a fly to stick on this crazy train, creepin' over the tops." Wick's eyes were plainly startled.

"Well, dammit, be a leech then. We've got to go." Which, to those who knew, sounded like the old Jack Barry. Wick threw down his scoop and started.

"An' tell Flannery soon as I stop to come runnin'. We don't know what we're likely to find. If you get back there, stay till I stop."

Jack Barry crashed by the little signboard stop of Durbin, almost bowled the empties in the spur completely over with the breeze he kicked up. He charged up a hill like a thing gone mad, his smoke plume low over his train. His engine blasted by a section shanty, roared into and out of a cut with the fierce blur of its exhaust deafening in the rocking, bouncing cab.

There came then five peeps urgently on the air whistle, and Jack made a note in his mind that Wick had succeeded in getting his message to Flannery. He whipped out his watch and peered ahead for a milepost. The telegraph poles sped by like the pickets of a fence.

A milepost appeared for a dizzy flash and then was gone to the darkness behind. Five miles to go to Three Rivers. The time was 9:44.

Two minutes later the exhaust air blared in the cab as Big Jack slapped air to his wheels for a steadier pace. The reverse curves were before him. They were banked for a speed of fifty. Not much more than that.

The cab seemed to lift from its springs, cab and frame and engine. But the big hog settled down again, straightened, swerved to the left.

Another mile, and now Big Jack rolled by the grim reminders of his awful

smash. The broken trees were down the fill where his engine had come to rest that night with a third of Bilbo's standing train in burning splinters, but he did not see them. His eyes were steadily ahead on the curving track, his hand sure on his brake valve.

AT THE whistle post—station one mile—the engine careened dizzily, found straight track, held true to the rails. Ahead of him Jack caught the quick flash of Mickey's marker lights, red and forbidding on the rear coach. He jerked his whistle cord and tied it down. It was maddening, deafening, but it was meant to carry a message.

And so Jack Barry came boiling into town. He threw his air into full emergency, because he knew it was the only way he could stop. He hoped that the crew in the rear car would be holding on, because, if they were standing, they'd be knocked flat.

He came down to a shrieking, fire-flinging, skidding stop. His pilot kicked up dust not two feet from the vestibule of the first section's rear coach. His wheels were smoking. His headlight pointed into the car ahead, and he reached up and switched it off. Jumping from his cushion, he took the first weapon that offered itself. His fingers closed over the long iron rod of the engine clinker-hook. Clutching it, he leaped from the cab on the left-hand side.

Big Jack charged down the gravel platform of the lonely, deserted station. In the distance, where the concrete highway came close to the track, an automobile waited without lights. A mail car door was open. A cluster of grim figures, dim in the inadequate light, was separating.

Out of the shadows a dark form confronted Big Jack. A gun was leveled at him as a hoarse voice barked—

"Stay where you are, fella—"

It was plain that the howling, thundering coming of the second section had ripped a big hole in somebody's plans. The group at the mail car, Jack saw, seemed confused and uncertain.

Jack halted in his stride only long enough to take the measure of the man with the gun.

Big Jack lunged with the long clinker-hook. The curved end of the weapon, like a suddenly striking snake in the dark, took the grim figure squarely between the eyes. The leveled gun barked; blue and yellow flame spurted; and a bullet ripped a slice out of Big Jack's left side pocket. Before the man could pull the trigger again Jack was on him.

The gunman's aides, sensing the full import of danger from the rear, dashed toward where Jack and the other man struggled.

"Hold off any more of that other crew," a hoarse voice bellowed. "We'll take care of this—"

The taking care was not so easy. The quarters were too close for gunfire now. Jack found himself surrounded. It seemed that an army was on him. In reality there were three pitted against him. His fists began to fly like the pistons of an engine. Some one slugged him on the back of the neck, close to the base of the brain. The blow staggered him.

He sank to one knee, blinking at the colored lights dancing before his eyes. He was dimly aware that two men were feverishly dragging something from the mail car door—perhaps the registered sack. Dazedly he wondered why Wick and the rest of his crew did not show up. He wondered why the mail clerks didn't take advantage of the break to open fire.

There were shouts behind him. Two shots cracked almost in his ears. He tasted the acrid fumes of powder, felt a burn on his cheek. Hard fingers closed over his windpipe.

"I got him! Plug him!"

The voice was in his right ear; he felt its breath.

It was with a superhuman effort that

he raised himself a little, got to his knees. He was being choked off, and a strange giddiness assailed him. He charged upright, and the man at his throat, in that fierce, sudden lurch, was hurled aside as if he had been a sack of meal. Jack saw a gun raised at his chest. But it was never fired.

"Gang on 'em! Yow!"

In a wild surge of exultation, Jack recognized the battle cry of his brother. His voice was drowned out in the roar of other voices and the sound of running feet. Jack recognized Wick Kennedy in the lead, armed with a coal pick, others of both train crews charging behind him. The bandits fired a few wild shots, then broke and started to run. The waiting automobile at the end of the platform roared into life, but the railroad men were on the bandits before they made much headway toward it.

One gun spat, and the first section's brakeman went down face first, clawing at his side. Big Jack made a diving tackle of the man who fired, and the bandit's head crashed into the gravel. Another shot winged a mail clerk.

Thereafter the affray became a tangle of arms and legs. Guns were useless. Jack picked out the biggest man he could distinguish in the half light. Jack's cheek was split open, one eye partly closed. His adversary clawed at him and clinched, and they both fell, rolling.

There were no fine rules of fighting called into play. It was kick and claw and gouge. It was a battle to the finish, and Big Jack wasn't sure who would be finished first. He was half blinded, and a sickening dizziness of exhaustion smote his senses. The struggling figure beneath him kicked him in the stomach, knocked the wind almost completely from him.

Big Jack, as he said long after, really got mad. Pitting the last ounce of energy in his great body against the kicking, struggling hulk in his grasp, he smashed ruthlessly at the hard, wide features before him. He might have pounded half the night, so far gone was he himself, had not firm hands seized him from behind and pulled him away. He turned on the unseen figure, fists flailing.

"Hey, you big hyena! Don't you know when a war's over?"

His fists stopped. Through the haze that clouded his senses he knew it was Mickey. He blinked his eyes to restore some measure of vision. He was surprised to see that lights surrounded him now.

"Darn near killed the poor feller," Mickey was saying.

Jack finally focused his gaze on the senseless hulk at his feet. He turned dumbly to his brother, saw blood over Mickey's eye.

"You all right, kid?" Jack asked weakly. He leaned against a car for support. "They—they—didn't—get—you—"

"No, Jack, thanks to you. Two of 'em in my cab. They was fixin' to tie me up when you came whistlin' into town like you did, scarin' the livin' lights outta them."

Jack swiped the back of his hand across his eyes. He leaned down and peered closer into the upturned features of Mickey.

"I hadda get here, Mickey," he said. Then, stammering, "I—I hadda—tell—tell you, kid, that—well, about this afternoon. You know, Mick, I—"

"Well, you got here," Mickey broke in, grinning.

"About this afternoon, Mick. I—"

"How much time did you use," Mickey broke in, "from the bridge, where you broke your water glass, down to where you stopped?"

"Seventeen minutes," Jack said glumly. "I got away to a slow start."

Mickey laughed.

"Seventeen minutes. Twenty miles. Shadin' my time—the best I ever done on that stretch—by three minutes. And they said you was yellow—afraid to run!"

Big Jack looked down at his hands.

"But about this afternoon, Mick—"

"Nuts," said Mickey.

The Camp-Fire

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

ON THE occasion of his first story in *Adventure*, in this issue, Charles A. Rawlings rises to say a few informal words to the members of the Camp-fire:

Key West, Florida

"Old Whee-e-e-e" was written in a notebook, now very greasy and water-soaked, as I lay on my back over twenty fathoms. I wanted to see the deepwater banks in March, and Captain Jeen Janaules took me on his *Dolphin*, the crack deepwater boat of the Anclote fleet. She is a double-ender, 40 feet over all, and most of her 40 feet houses the gear and the sponge hold. There were twelve of us—six divers and the rest seamen, helmsmen, lifeline men. There was not much else but the bunk for me, but I had a grand time. It was a swell chance to realize the sea. They could speak very little English. I knew no Greek. I could dream for hours without worrying about talking to anybody or having to answer human questions. Yet none of the loneliness of single-handed cruising was there to depress the mind. We laughed a great deal and sang at night. I remember a 6-pound octopus stewed up in macaroni, and that we came off one slate gray morning in as smoky a southerly as I want to be out in in 40 feet of hull.

I was fascinated by the name the sponger has given the hurricane: "Old Whee-e-e-e". He told me to write a story around it. I had had a character on my mind for some time. A character something like Tennyson's *Ulysses*. An old man who "strove with gods", who was at the end of his tether, but who desperately wanted to "sail beyond the sunset and the baths of all the western stars," until he died. I made "Old Whee-e-e-e" his friend and brought them together.

My hurricane had to be foreshortened in time. The action takes only 16-18 hours when, of course, an actual hurricane takes much longer from groundswell and sun-dogs to the finish. The other characteristics are all right. But it's a storm for a saga, not for a *Bowditch*.

I saw "the clouds like feathers" three days ago. We are lying in Key West harbor in a little 35-foot topsail schooner—the *Ina*—last of the west coast traders and a little low pressure cleared the Yucatan and moved up the Gulf about a hundred miles offshore. The mare's tails were very distinct at sunset. They are beautiful and terrible, when you know what they are.

There is not much to tell about me. I live with small boats and small-boat men and I find that living with them and writing about them is all of happiness. —CHARLES A. RAWLINGS

FURTHER sidelights on the Civil War: notes sent in by Gordon Young to accompany his serial, "When the Bravest Trembled", Part III of which appears in this issue:

Beginning of the War.

Lincoln was elected Nov. 6th, 1860. He represented what was known to the South as the "black abolitionist party". Pollard's "Southern History", I, p. 35, says Lincoln was supported by the worst enemies of the South; so the South, believing that all chance of satisfactory compromise with the new administration was gone, at once prepared for war—but not with real expectation of having to fight.

However anxious the South may have been to fight, it did not believe the North dared venture into war. That notion may have been partly based on the feeling that Southerns were a cavalier race, Northerners mechanics and artisans; but it was confirmed by the widespread conviction that Southern sympathizers (the Democratic party) were too numerous in the North, and by the idea that England and France would openly join the Southern cause out of their great need for cotton and tobacco. The South was disappointed in both hopes. Stephen A. Douglas, the Democratic leader, to the astonishment of almost every one, both North and South, in numerous fiery speeches declared, "The rebellion must be put down; the Union must be saved."

Southern leaders had foretold that if the Yankees blockaded Southern ports, the industries of England would starve through lack of cotton. That very nearly happened; and though the aristocratic class and dominant statesmen of England were very Southern in their sentiments, the factory people who were thrown out of work and even touched with famine were, and remained in the midst of privation, intensely Northern in their sympathies. That was an attitude so contrary to the usual reaction of human nature that Southern statesmen can not be blamed for their miscalculation. But they were so strongly convinced that war would not follow secession that

"Mr. Jefferson said in a speech, delivered at La Grange, Mississippi, before the secession of that State, that he would agree to drink all the blood spilled South of Mason and Dixon's line if there should be war." (Grant's "Memoirs", I, p. 223.) Senator Barnwell Rhett declared war was impossible and promised to drink all the blood spilt. ("Southern Sketches", by De Witt C. Roberts, p. 242.) Southern orators said a lady's thimble would hold all the blood spilt from secession. (Sherman's "Memoirs", I, p. 167.)

Secession was an accomplished fact before Lincoln was inaugurated. Nearly all forts, arsenals, mints and custom houses had been seized between his election and inauguration. On Feb. 9th, 1861, Jefferson Davis had been elected President of the Confederate States. There was no strong Northern war spirit until Sumter fell. Horace Greeley in the Tribune urged the Union to let the South secede. Gen. Scott said, "Wayward Sisters, let them go in peace." ("Autobiography and Personal Reminiscences" of Maj.-Gen. Ben. F. Butler.) Secretary of State Seward, as late as March, 1861, had contempt for any one who thought there was anything serious in secession. ("My Diary", p. 35; also p. 355.) Secretary of Treasury Chase was willing to let the seceded States go and find out their mistake for themselves.

Emancipation Proclamation

Officers and men were opposed to the Emancipation Proclamation. (Hedley's "Marching Through Georgia", p. 56.) Gen. Nelson whipped slaves to make them return to their masters. ("The Iron Furnace", p. 272.) Halleck's Order No. 3 (1861) forbade fugitive slaves to enter the lines of any camp or military force. (Rhodes' "Civil War", p. 60, note.) Grant said the majority of people in the North recognized the South's property right in slaves. ("Memoirs", I, 214.) Lincoln had no constitutional right to free slaves and "only claimed legal force for his Proclamation in so far as it was an act of war . . . tending to help Northern arms . . . but it committed the North to a course from which there was no turning back." (Charnwood's "Lincoln", p. 314.)

South Disliked Word "Slavery"

Southerners usually referred to slavery as "our peculiar institution." In Pollard's History, III, p. 196, is the following footnote: "In referring to the condition of the negro in this war, we use the term *Slavery* in these pages under strong protest. For there is no such thing in the South; it is a term fastened upon us by the exaggeration and conceit of Northern literature, and most improperly acquiesced in by Southern writers. There is a system of African *servitude* in the South; in which the negro, so far from being under the absolute dominion of his master (which is the true meaning of the vile word *slavery*) has by *law* of the land, his personal rights recognized and protected, and his comfort and 'right of happiness' consulted, and by the *practice* of the system, has a sum of individual indulgences which make him altogether the most striking type in the world of cheerfulness and contentment . . ."

A WORD about our magazine, from a bulletin issued to National Guard Headquarters by the War Department:

". . . The stories of Leonard Nason are especially valuable. This author has captured the spirit and language of the soldiers of the A. E. F. Some stories have appeared in book form, others in the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Adventure*. The latter magazine has also stories of the French Foreign Legion by Georges Surdez and other writers who know their subject intimately; or stories of the American Army by Malcolm Wheeler Nicholson and others, in which many practical lessons in command, discipline and tactics may be found. Old copies may be picked up in second-hand book stores or purchased through the magazine itself. A file for the company library would be a great asset."

SPEED shooting with Army automatics: a bit from Donegan Wiggins of Ask Adventure.

Salem, Oregon

As regards fast shooting, it was a practice in the old Regular Army for the men who were shooting for record with the pistol to remove the disconnector of the .45 Colt automatic Service pistol; and though it was against regulations, a lot of them got away with it and poured out a volley of shots that sounded like a machine gun at work. I wouldn't care to try it, however. One man I know of filed off the top of the disconnector of his .45 Colt automatic, and said the firing finished with the muzzle pointing straight up, and his hand feeling like he'd taken hold of a dynamo.

—DONEGAN WIGGINS

MORE about natural thirst-quenchers—some in Cuba:

Los Angeles, California

I should like to confirm Mr. G. B. Huddleston's statement in the August number of *Adventure* regarding water-giving vines in the Tropics.

A number of times during my twenty-eight years in Cuba I have slaked by thirst with the water of the *bejuco*, pronounced "bay-hoo-ko." Mr. Huddleston described the method of using it, and the only difference between his vines and those in the Cuban forests seems to be that his are larger.

The water is not to be recommended for the table; but when one is in the depths of the jungle with no ordinary water convenient, one is often thankful for a drink from this *bejuco*. The word really means a reed that grows in swampy places; but in Cuba it is used as the generic term for "vine."

WHILE we are on the subject of water from unusual sources, permit me to mention one other. Many of the forest trees are infested by parasitic plants which the Americans designate by the much-inclusive name of "air plants." Many of them are very rare orchids. Their similarity to young pineapple plants has led to some amusing incidents. One American in the colony of La Gloria bought some of these air plants from a Cuban who told the newly arrived foreigner that they were pineapple plants.

These parasites nearly always contain water among the bases of their broad, thick leaves, the source being either the rain or the dew—sometimes both. The forest shade keeps the liquid cool.

If one can reach a plant on a lower limb of a tree and break it off or bend it downward without spilling the water, one gets a drink. Often the lower plants can not be reached with the hand; but may be within range of the ever present machete. An upward thrust through the base of the plant lets the water run down the blade and the handle into the mouth of the thirsty one.

—ROBT. B. ANDERSON, M. D.

WILD land reclamation versus conservation: William Wells of Ask Adventure queries Raymond S. Spears on some points raised in his story, "The Tune of the Poison Dead" in our August issue:

Sisters, Oregon

Curiosity, the pursuit of knowledge, you know, compels me to ask a few questions of Brother Spears about his story, "The Tune of the Poison Dead":

Where was this country where the hero could shoot from two to five hundred dollars a year ahead of a dog and what kind of fur was it?

How were the little white dots—poison pills—made, and what was the object in scattering them in all directions around the carcass for half a mile?

What were the wild hides, and what kind of game was it by which the dog fed himself and the trapper to boot?

What kind of a country was it that would yield sixty to eighty dollars a square mile in skins and about fifty dollars in meat, and what kind of meat was it? Also what kind of skins?

What country does Brother Spears have in mind that would yield more in furs and skins per square mile—value, that is—than it would yield from farming or stock raising?

Where was it ever claimed that coyotes killed horses and cattle?

Where was it ever claimed that bobcats killed horses and cattle?

Did the learned brother ever see a four-bore shotgun that was choke bored?

What kind of acid is it that gives out the odor of crushed peach stones, and could it be handled—poured into a bottle whisky, that is—with any sort of safety? —WILLIAM WELLS

Mr. Spears' reply:

Inglewood, California

All the statements regarding wild life statistics and poisoning, trapping, wildcraft in "The Tune of the Poison Dead" developed partly out of research for answers to questions addressed to magazine departments—*Hunter-Trader-Trapper,* Ask Adventure, and especially from compilations and conditions considered in my work as Conservation Director of the American Trappers' Association, and partly confirmed by observation.

The story was for about the period 1920-24. The locale I had in mind was Dakota Bad Lands. Prices were very high at this time, and if you will examine files of the *Hunter-Trader-Trapper* and *Fur News* you will find that fur and wild hide hunters shot a great deal of money-value, wherever furs (not molested during the War) had greatly increased. The type of dog I had in mind was pointer-hound-Airedale cross. More than 100 deer were shot over such a dog (a pointer breed) in one autumn in the Adirondacks. Fur dogs are relatively scarce, but you can learn a great deal about them in a few dozen back numbers of professional trapper magazines. Cross-fox, mink, wildcats, otter, muskrats, coyotes and so on were available in the region described. If you look at the price lists of furs from 1920-24 periods you will see possibilities. A trapper in the high Sierras averaged more than $6,000 several years in a fur-pocket California poisoners had not "controlled."

TALLOW pills are made by casting beef tallow in a dish. The tallow is cut into inch-cubes and 4 grains of strychnine inserted in a hole in each. The knife blade is heated, the hole plugged with tallow and sealed with the blade. Where coyotes are sly, they sometimes do not come near a "big bait"—and trappers and poisoners both "set" far from the carcass on runways used by the suspicious animals. However, I was describing a bluffer and a liar who did some things that were enough off for those who know their stuff to detect his quality—as when he called police dogs "coyotes." I did not give even best poison practise in the story, but the kind of thing *Homer Gerlack* would do.

I get your point that a trapper would not eat $50 worth of meat. However this kind of trapper would jerk and salt and make sausage of many kinds of meat, and he would be sure to leave a good deal with his ranch and homestead neighbors. With game plenty, taken care of as it is in the Black Forest of Germany where stores sell nothing but game, $50 would be a low value for a trapper's incidental meat shooting. The wild hides were, of course, burro, wild horse, and other "hair" and leather mammals, as well as deer; perhaps a cougar or other Bad Lands prairie animal. You know, of course, that trappers prefer cougar, beaver tail and coyote meat to the split hoof venisons, for example. I'm speaking of old-timers.

I DON'T know of any kind of country west of the 100th meridian or east of it—wild lands—save dry lakes that would not yield $60 to $1,000 a square mile or more. One good muskrat marsh when the hides were selling at $4.50 would yield

ten an acre or $3,880 a square mile. The Bad Lands would generally yield $100 to $200 a square mile annually if wild life was given half a chance. New York State gave $40 for the whole state, Pennsylvania $55—$1,800,000 and $2,500,000. Producing areas in those sensible Eastern States give 25 times or more fur per producing area than Oregon. You get less than $3 a square mile in your State, so I understand your astonishment at my figures.

If Oregon's recently organized Wild Life Committee amounts to shucks it can in ten years give the State $4,000,000 worth of fur a year instead of $250,000 now. New York had $100,000 a year to start with. It had 8 wild beaver—now it has more than a million in fur a year and 20,000 wild beaver. Just look up the conservation reports of New York and Pennsylvania. Also, get the Roosevelt Wild Life College Economic Survey of Michigan (Syracuse, N. Y., Mr. Gurth Whipple at the College; Mr. Whipple's father's work as Forest, Fish and Game Commission marked the change from shameful waste to genuine conservation).

THE country that would produce more wild life values than domestic is found in the natural wilderness regions. 1,500,000 square miles are already this kind of terrain (see *World* Almanac farm statistics). To find out beef and mutton losses, study U. S. Government Documents on beef, sheep, and the statistics of Nevada, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, California, etc. The rest of the country loaned through Nevada banks $8.50 on sheep that were worth $1.92 in the market (the banker thought $2.50 when 18 banks failed there). Now it requires $18,000 investment to raise 1,200 sheep (see Dept. of Agriculture reports listed by Supt. Public Documents, Washington, D. C., on sheep and cattle on the range. Also, your Congressman could obtain for you bulletins regarding sheep and cattle).

Now in the territory where the sheep men all went broke and are going broke tending bands of a few hundred to a thousand or so of sheep, a game protector could look after 50,000 deer and tens of thousands of quail, grouse, sage-hens, a few thousand antelope, and more annual production value of wild fur than all the wool and mutton produced there. Don't take my word for it! When the American Trappers asked me to be their Conservation Director and I began to dig for statistics, I couldn't believe the facts.

OUR farms include 1,500,000 square miles. The 500,000 square miles are profitable—as good as banks, factories, other real business. But the 1,000,000 square miles in the farms are not only eating up in taxes, interest, debts, overhead all the profits of the 500,000 square miles but are sink holes for profits from profitable business of other types. The 1,000,000 miles up to the Pacific Ocean would support three times as many people as wild lands if only the non-profitable domestic lands were turned into wilderness conditions. Probably a million families on homesteads and irrigation projects and ranches thought they were farmers when as a matter of fact they were living on wild life. When the game and fur and fish were gone, they failed. They were, in fact, supporting horses, dogs, sheep, cattle on wilderness and Eastern profits—and when they squandered the borrowed money and they had destroyed their only really profitable incomes—furs and game and forests—they yelled bloody murder for help and higher prices.

The same applies to the Mississippi overflow bottoms, the Appalachian mountains, to more than half the areas in so-called farms. The damned fools drained the Klamath marshes and never made an honest or profitable dollar there as farms; too late they realized those marshes were supplying hundreds of tons of wild meat, furs of price. We could add $100,000,000 annually in fur merely by cutting out lands hogged for farms that would never pay a profit.

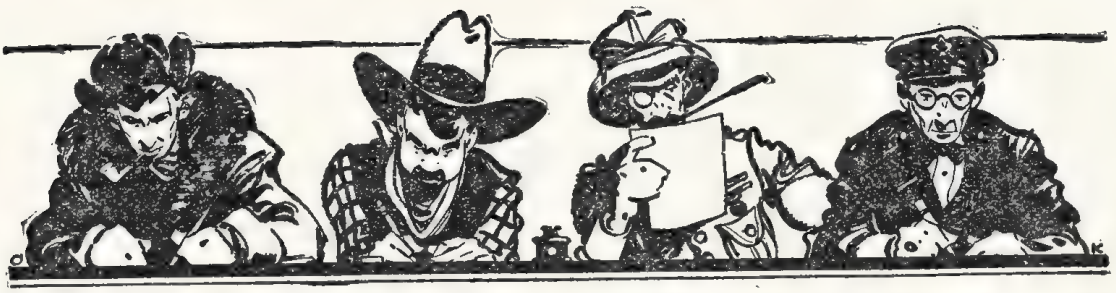
IF YOU wish to study this matter, verify it, examine the fur trade histories, the stories of homesteads, the Government reports and the statistics regarding furs, wild game, compared to the stuff raised by agriculturists and meat growers. Nature grew 1,500 pounds of buffalo beef on less than 3 acres of open range, and our pseudo-scientists coupled with farm "industry" grow 500 pounds of range beef on 18 to 125 acres of the same buffalo range (see Beef Production in Range Area, Farm Bul. No. 1395, etc). The Forest Service and Biological Survey are both distributing tons of poison which destroys the rodents at the mouths of whose old burrows and no where else is found bunch-grass. The rodents mulch the soil, fertilize it and seed it. Use your own eyes as to prairie dogs, gophers, ground squirrels, cottontails, woodchucks (in bunch-grass country) as to this statement that the Government itself is destroying the pasture forage wherever they poison burrowing rodents. The Forest Service starts within ten days of this date to poison ground squirrels and other rodents around the Roosevelt Forestry Camps—and those rodents are often the only meat supply for homesteaders, ranchers, vagabonds of the wastelands.

As to claims that coyotes kill cows, horses, etc., look into the Biological Survey's so-called scientific reports on predatory animals, and their poison advertising literature. Strychnine sells at 93 cents an ounce wholesale, but thallium is lots better, $3.25, and no cure for this! As to bobcats destroying large animals, I said the poisoner claimed that. It is no more absurd than Government poison-propaganda document claims.

IN THE '80s in Squire's gunstore in New York City I looked through a 4-bore; the pinch at the muzzle was obvious. At least that was my memory of it. I won't crawl on the matter, though my remark was quoting a character; I don't know that 4-bores are choked.

Prussic acid, used to poison wild life in liquid form in capsules. Seems queer, your idea that a poisoner wouldn't use poison because it couldn't be handled with safety. Even whisky kills its victims, prussic acid merely adding to its suddenness.

Just you get the story of wildlife in Oregon; there was more than 200 times as much meat provided by nature in the United States area *now unfit for* domestic use as all the domestic birds, mammals, reptile meat now—and wise man replaced it with ½ of 1% as much utterly unfit domestic animals. —RAYMOND S. SPEARS



He wrote to the right man!

He wanted the lowdown on wild-animal catching. Sure enough he found a bring-'em-back-aliver on the Ask Adventure staff. Read his letter below, and Gordon MacCreagh's answer.

You too may have some practical problem you think no one can answer. Ten to one you're mistaken. Whether it's how to waterproof your boots or de-fang a rattlesnake, Ask Adventure!

Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Animal Catcher

ADVICE to a young man who would bring-'em-back-alive.

Request—"Another chap and I are determined to go into the wild animal business, and I thought you might be able to give us your own opinion of our whole idea.

We intend to do most, if not all, of our work in South America, the Malay States and Africa, especially the last two. Although we are just going to leave high school, we have already started on our preparations. I have studied Spanish, Swahili, Italian, Latin, Suk and Nandi languages, and am starting Chinese. My pal knows Russian and Swahili slightly. We both have a good knowledge of zoölogy and natural history. However, we don't intend to start until we have spent the next 4 or 5 years in preparing, saving money and learning. By that time we should have a good knowledge of: Spanish, Swahili, Nandi, Suk, Masai, Italian, Malayan, photography, zoölogy, natural history, geography of countries, medicine (slightly), taxidermy and a few other important things. Please don't try to discourage us needlessly, for we are set on it, but don't hesitate to give us any constructive criticism, for it will do us good.

What do you think of our plan? What are the possibilities of entering such a career? Do you think we have planned a good foundation? We are both 18 years old (don't laugh!) and in 5 years we ought to be old enough to try, and do, work in such a field. What's the cheapest way to get to Malaya? Incidentally, don't think we're just a couple of silly kids trying to be romantic, or some such thing. We're serious. *Qua heri!*"

—RICHARD CAVALTERO, Rochester, New York

Reply, by Mr. Gordon MacCreagh:—To begin with, I'm not laughing at you. I was eighteen once and I wanted to be an animal catcher. But I'm going to discourage you all the same. And why? Because I became an animal catcher just where you want to go—South America and the Malay States.

I'm all for your ambition. Splendid! But out of hard experience I—well, I can't be encouraging; though I don't go so far as to say forget it. Other people have become animal catchers; and some of them have made money at it. Perhaps you and your friend will succeed. But don't imagine that all bring-'em-back-alivers turn out to be Frank Bucks. The best I can do is to tell you some of the difficulties, some of the pitfalls, and to hope that the forewarning will perhaps enable you to duck some of them.

Let me first of all tell you of some of the trouble that you can save yourself—all these languages that you are studying. Tell me, will you, where the heck, you, in Rochester, have learned Swahili? Honest, I'd like to know. Who in Rochester teaches Swahili, to say nothing of Suk and Nandi?

But you can cut those last two out. Forget them. If you go game catching in Africa you have, roughly speaking, three wide areas—South-Central, East and West Coast.

In South-Central every headman and tentboy that you'll ever need will speak enough English to get along. In East, Swahili will carry you everywhere. Only old-time residents and missionaries speak Suk and Nandi. West Coast dialects are too numerous to attempt; but Kroo pidgin will cover all your needs.

To go on down your list: Masai, Italian. (What territory has Italy where there's game?)

Stick to Spanish for S.A; that's O.K. Malay would be useful in the Malay States; but if you

can learn any Malay out of a book in Rochester you're going some. Photography, zoölogy, taxidermy, medicine. Get all you can of those. Geography you learn when you get there. When you land in East Africa it doesn't do you any good to know the boundaries of Tanganyika Territory. You want to know how far the next water hole is; and your tentboy, who never went to Rochester High, will tell you that.

NOW for some of the difficulties:
You'll need money; and then some more money; and then, when you're broke, you'll have to know where to go to borrow some more money. That's what I didn't have; and that's why, after some six desultory years of it, I flopped as a big game catcher.

And I'll tell you why you must have so much money. Big game critters don't run around much in the vicinity of railroads. You've got to go away from railroads; far away. It costs money to travel away from railroads. Having gotten away, you can eat quite cheaply. But having caught your big game, it can't live quite cheaply. Some day you may have to feed a live lion for a week or so, and then you'll know. And just pray that it may not be a rhinoceros.

Finicky is what wild critters are when they're suddenly shoved into a cage; and they'll contract innard troubles and will die for no reason that you, or the world's best veterinary, will ever know.

However, having caught your large beastie and having kept him alive, you can't tie a string to him and lead him to the railroad station, three hundred miles away. You must build a cage on wheels and you must get half a hundred colored gentlemen to haul the thing with ropes—and to *hew roads* for its passage. And you won't believe how much money that costs.

And two large beasties cost twice as much as one; and three large beasties cost—but go ahead and do your own sums. Remember only that it doesn't pay to make a trip that doesn't net quite a few of the bigger and more valuable critters.

ALL right; you've spent money, lots of it, getting your catch to the railroad and down to your seaport. You have two possibilities open to you. Either you have a rolling heap of more money to buy passage for your animals *with* attendants, feeder, and so on; to land them in your American port; to transport them from the dock to your private zoo; and to keep them there, feed them, doctor them, keep them in tip-top condition till you sell them—maybe a month, maybe six months, maybe a year. My friend, Elias Joseph, bring-em-back-aliver, has had three camels on his hands for three years.

Your alternative to that millionaire business is to wait at your port of catching till the buying agent of some big dealer, like Hagenbeck, comes along. That's a lot cheaper. Feed, help, space, in, say, Singapore, cost one fifth of what they do in N. Y. That's fine. Along comes the buying agent. He's a business man; he holds his job because he knows where to buy cheap. His line of talk is that thirty per cent of animals die on every sea voyage and he can't be paying out good money for something that may pass out in a steamboat's lower deck. So he offers you, say, fifty dollars for a black panther. You may know that the market price for a black panther in New York City is eight hundred dollars; but the agent reminds you that black panthers are notoriously prone to seasickness, may die from it.

Fifty bucks; take it cash; or—the agent grins—hold on to your beastie, and no hard feelings; keep it awhile and prices may rise so he can offer you a bit more. And that's true, too; prices may rise; but until they do your panther is costing you about thirty dollars for every month you feed him—and mind you keep him good and fat, or his price will depreciate.

So I say again, *money*.

There's the biggest difficulty and the worst pitfall. If you can get over them O.K, you'll be a successful bring-'em-back-aliver. Me, I couldn't make the grade. And if I'd had that much money, what would I want to go risking my health catching wild things for, anyway?

As to how to learn the business of wild animal catching. Son, there ain't no way to learn. It'll be a lot easier to learn Little Dyak Malay out of a book in Rochester than to learn the animal business. It would be silly for me to tell you the obvious thing—get a job with some museum expedition or with some animal importer. I wouldn't know how to do that myself.

No, there is only one thing to do. Go out where you hope to start your work; live there; learn the ways of animals; talk to people who know conditions; and then go ahead and learn by trial and error—and both those words are just an anagram for money.

One good suggestion I can make; but I know you won't like that. Go get a job as a keeper in a zoo, so you get some experience about keeping animals alive in cages; and that'll be an experience that will save you more than a little money. Remember, *thirty per cent die.* With a thorough zoo grounding you might cut that down to about fifteen.

And how about one of you taking a veterinary course? Many's the time I wished I had.

A SUGGESTION is that you subscribe to the National Geographic Magazine, $3.00 a year, or keep in touch with it in your library. It will give you more about detailed conditions of all sorts of out of the way places than any twenty other publications. I'd be glad to put you up for membership, if you wish—you have to be a member of the Society to get the publication.

Three bucks all told.

Do I think you have planned a good foundation? I think you've planned too much; more than you can possibly assimilate; and more than you need to attempt. But I've already told you what you can cut out.

I'm sorry I can't paint for you a brighter picture. Animal catching is a very specialized and precarious business. As I have told you, my own fizzle was due to not having enough money to tide over difficulties. Maybe some other genius of organization and financing may be able to swing something without a millionaire's bank account. I hope you will be such a genius.

And, anyway, even if you go broke—even though you may make good eventually—at all events you will have had a hell of a good time. *Qua heri, ya kuonana!*

Ski

LINSEED oil and wax for the Winter sportsman's kit.

Request:—"I have a new pair of maple skis (cross country). Could you tell me the proper way to prepare the bottoms or running surfaces of them?" —WILLIAM FICK, Boston, Massachusetts

Reply, by Mr. W. H. Price:—The bottoms of new skis should be given several coats of boiled linseed oil, each being allowed to sink in before the next is applied. When at last the wood will absorb no more, give a coat of raw linseed oil; this dries hard, with a surface just rough enough for easy climbing, but slippery enough to make waxing unnecessary, except for the very stickiest snow.

When the snow is wet and sticky, you can wax them to prevent the snow from sticking to the ski. It is smeared on the ski and rubbed in with a rag. Always make sure the ski is good and dry before applying the wax.

Amazon

IN NEW YORK you can catch a steamer bound right up the river.

Request:—"Could you give me the name of steamship lines operating between New York and the Amazon region? What food and clothing should one carry on a trip up the river?"
—BLAKE SULLIVAN, Sioux City, Iowa

Reply, by Dr. Paul Vanorden Shaw:—The Booth S.S. Line, New York City, will give you full information. All Booth lines go up the Amazon. It would cost you five or six hundred dollars to go up and back. If you travel on steamship lines you won't need to carry your own food, and only light clothing will be necessary.

Auto Trailer

A HOME on wheels more luxurious than any Gypsy ever dreamed of.

Request:—"Will you please furnish me with any information you may have available on cabin trailers? I expect to be in the market for a trailer to be hooked behind a passenger car, probably a coupé, which I hope to take out on the road for a period of months, perhaps a year or more.

The party will consist of not more than three, probably two, with a couple of dogs. Living and cooking quarters should be in the trailer."
—HARRISON KENDALL, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Reply, by Major Charles G. Percival:—The trailer is the ideal job for you and your dogs. I've traveled 250,000 miles with a trailer. I recommend the Gilkie, the best demountable, collapsible camp-trailer on the market. Comes equipped with double beds (spring beds), mattresses, ice chest, lockers, electric lights; light in weight (about 850 lbs.), tows accurately behind any car, about a 25-lb. drawbar pull; cuts your mileage down not over a mile to the gallon; gives you a clean, comfortable, dry home at night and freedom from insect pests. It is always ready; stove, ice chest, lockers (damp-and-insect-proof) for bedding, food, etc. Can be put up in a minute and dismounted instanter. Puts all sorts of camping on a home basis and provides an excellent home for your dogs. It will earn its initial cost in the first three months out in saving camp or cabin fees. By all means buy a camp trailer and see that it is a Gilkie. Their factory is in Terre Haute, Indiana; and you can easily run over from Fort Wayne and inspect it.

There is a wide aisle between the beds in the Gilkie, giving space in camp at night and storage space when on tour. The company makes two jobs—one a 2-passenger with single beds (around $275) and one with double beds for four ($380). Most of the other camp trailers on the market are heavy and cumbersome—some weigh around 2400 pounds. Not being collapsible, they present too much height against wind resistance, which means more gasoline consumption, tire cost, oil consumption and wear on motor, brakes and transmission. The Gilkie is light and, being collapsible, presents little wind resistance. If you are only two, I suggest the 2-passenger, or Travelair, model.

Canal Zone

BETTER not take your fine furniture or rugs; wicker is cooler and more impervious to mildew.

Request:—"I shall soon be transferred to the Canal Zone, to serve in the capacity of chief quarantine officer with headquarters at Balboa. 1. Will I be justified in taking with me such personal household belongings as fine old family furniture, Oriental rugs and oil paintings, or will the rainy season prove destructive in spite of good care? 2. What, if any, heavy clothing and wraps need be taken? 3. Shall I take with me a fast, light weight outboard motor hull and motor which I now use with great pleasure in Mobile Bay?" —C. V. AKIN, Mobile, Alabama

Reply, by Mr. E. Bruguiere:—1. I would not advise taking valuable furniture or paintings. The dampness and mildew will ruin them. As for rugs, the climate is too hot to make them necessary. Rattan and wicker furniture and grass rugs are generally used for coolness.

2. Only such wraps and coats as are used in early fall here will be necessary. Sweaters and shawls would be useful for evenings during the rainy season.

3. Your boat should afford you a great deal of pleasure in the Zone.

A complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears on page 126

THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE is free, provided self-addressed envelop and FULL POSTAGE for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.

Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to this magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The expert will in all cases answer to the best of his ability, but neither he nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing or for employment. **Ask Adventure** covers outdoor opportunities, but only in the way of general advice.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; regattas.*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 117 W. Harrison St., Chicago, Illinois.

Motor Boating GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motor Camping MAJOR CHAS. G. PERCIVAL, M. D., care American Tourist Camp Assn., 152 West 65th St., New York City.

Yachting A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Place, Chicago, Ill.

Motor Vehicles *Operation, legislative restrictions and traffic.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

Automotive and Aircraft Engines *Design, operation and maintenance.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

All Shotguns, *including foreign and American makes; wing shooting.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers, *foreign and American.*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Box 69, Salem, Ore.

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First Aid CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Box 322, Westfield, New Jersey.

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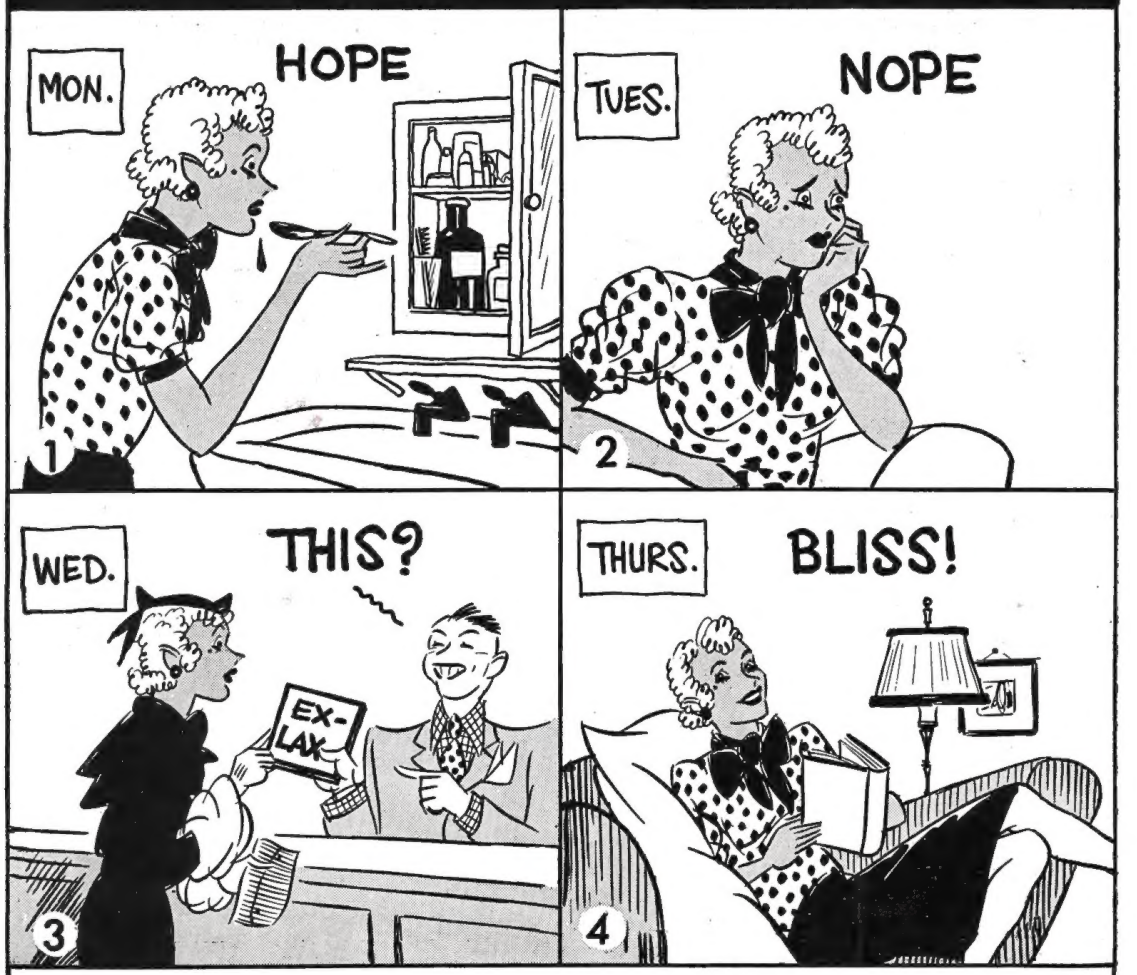

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